

CELEBRITY POLITICS AND THE CULTIVATION OF AFFECT IN THE PUBLIC
SPHERE

by

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Abstract

CELEBRITY POLITICS AND THE CULTIVATION OF AFFECT IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Celebrity political participation has become so commonplace in contemporary American life that it has come to be expected— it is hardly surprising when Lena Dunham joins Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail, George Clooney visits Sudan, or Jennifer Lawrence writes an essay on the gender pay gap. Celebrity politics are also pervasive, resulting from the constant media coverage of celebrities. Yet, because news of celebrity politics appears alongside gossip stories and because celebrities can (and do) say stupid things, it makes it easier to discount celebrities as illegitimate and overlook them as potentially influential political agents. This ignores the powerful position of celebrities, who through existing media attention and branding are able to inform the political views of average citizen-subjects.

Delineating the form celebrity politics take in contemporary America and asking how they function, I examine the role of celebrity politics in the public sphere, identifying

three models of celebrity politics that I argue are most commonplace: liberal democratic, neoliberal, and hybrid (an attempt to pursue liberal democratic aims through a neoliberal framework). I map out how each model works through an analysis of distinct moments of twenty-first century celebrity politics—including participation in the anti-war, Save Darfur, and LGBTQ rights movements. As I show, each model relies on the positionality of the celebrity in different ways, all of which center around the celebrity's cultural capital and the affective relationship cultivated between ordinary and celebrity citizens. Ultimately I argue that affect plays a key role in both the average citizen-subject's relationship to celebrities and in the approach of celebrities to politics. While celebrities might initially contribute to the development of a political public sphere, for them to be true, progressive agents of social change, there must be a point where emotion is converted to reason, lest the former undermine the latter. Therefore, I conclude that the next move for celebrities—if they are actually invested in politics—is to work to re-channel emotion, the necessary initial fuel for political motivation, into concrete, practical ideas and action.

Introduction

The Celebrity Specter

We do care about raising attention and money for the thousands that died in Nepal. We do care about the tens of thousands being slaughtered by ISIS. We care that other people care more about, or know more about the Kardashians than these issues. James Shamsi, creator of #KardBlock¹

Over the past few months my Facebook feed and the various aggregator news sites I frequent have been ablaze with discussion of #KardBlock, an app designed to “make the Internet a Kardashian-free zone” by blocking all mention of the family from your web browser.² Based on the premise that media coverage of the Kardashian family is so omnipresent that anything of substance gets “crushed,” the app works by replacing “Kardashian-related links with helpful news stories.”³ Response to #KardBlock was generally positive: the *Daily Beast* categorized their coverage of the app under “cleansing,” Twitter user @DeeCSweets exclaimed that “I hope so many people start using #KardBlock that it ‘breaks the internet’. Haha!”, while Shamsi was touted as “my

¹ Jose Alvarez, “App Developer Wants to Erase All Traces of the Kardashian Family Online With His #Kardblock App,” *Digital Trends*, May 10, 2015, <http://www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/kardblock-app-will-remove-everything-kardashian-from-your-web-browser/>.

² Oliver Jones, “Finally-An App That Can Block All Kardashians,” *The Daily Beast*, May 8, 2010, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/08/how-to-rid-yourself-of-the-kardashians.html>.

³ Ibid.; Ashley Majeski, “#KardBlock: British man creates app that filters out all mention of the Kardashians,” *Entertainmentwise*, June, 2015, <http://www.entertainmentwise.com/culture/kardblock-british-man-creates-app-that-filters-out-all-mentions-of-the-kardashians-25878/#.VkAsrMuYHtY.twitter>.

hero!” by someone I have known for years.⁴ *Allure*, however, showing a bit more concern about the potential ramifications of the app than others, wondered what “about Bruce Jenner? Right now, his transition is pretty newsworthy and important.”⁵ According to various sources, Shamsi and his team are currently in the process of developing a similar app to censor out news on another celebrity they identify as taking up too much space in our daily lives: Justin Bieber.

Although #KardBlock is conceptually entertaining and technologically innovative, it is also culturally significant in that through erasure it perpetuates an emphasis on celebrities that continues to occupy the contemporary American media landscape. Furthermore, the need for a #KardBlock is indicative of the relationships fans develop with celebrities—even if it is based on the degree to which we, as media consumers, hate them, as so often seems to be the case with the Kardashians. While filtering out news on the Kardashians might enable you to avoid having to come across another story about Kylie Jenner’s lip fillers or Kim Kardashian-West’s pregnancy, you would still be faced with stories about Jennifer Lawrence tripping and falling (again!) or Gwen Stefani’s romantic relationships. Celebrity coverage occupies a prominent (and often unavoidable) position in the media we consume as Americans—from serious news institutions like *The New York Times* to gossip sites like *TMZ* to say nothing of social media—making it impossible to both avoid celebrities and also remain connected to

⁴ Jones, “Finally-An App That Can Block All Kardashians,” Rachel Ward, “#KardBlock browser extension bans Kardashians from your news feed,” *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/11582782/KardBlock-browser-extension-bans-Kardashians-from-your-news-feed.html>; and www.facebook.com/sondramblair.

⁵ Renee Jacques, “This App Bans the Kardashians From Your Browser,” *Allure*, May 11, 2015, <http://www.allure.com/beauty-trends/blogs/daily-beauty-reporter/2015/05/kardashian-news-blocking-app.html>.

distant friends on Facebook or tune into CNN to learn what is going on in the world, for example. As celebrity participation in the political sphere has also become more pronounced over the past few decades, stories of celebrity politics appear with the same regularity as coverage of celebrity gossip. Every day a new story breaks detailing a charity that celebrity X has created or noting the position that celebrity Y has taken on hot-button issue Z. Again, I turn to the media coverage of the Kardashians as an example.

When the 100-year anniversary of the genocide in Armenia occurred earlier this year, it was the Kardashians who visited the country, paying tribute to the lives lost and meeting with the Armenian Prime Minister.



Figure 1: Kim Kardashian-West and Khloe Kardashian visiting a memorial to the Armenian genocide

In an article Kim Kardashian-West wrote for *Time* magazine about the trip, the reality star called out both Turkey and the American government for not being willing to use the term genocide, writing that:

Now is the time to speak out, and every little bit helps. I will continue to ask the questions and fight for the genocide to be recognized for what it was. I would like President Obama to use the word *genocide*. It's very disappointing he hasn't used it as President. We thought it was going to happen this year. I feel like we're close—but we're definitely moving in the right direction.⁶

⁶ Kim Kardashian West, "Armenian Genocide Victims 'Should Never Be Forgotten,'" *Time*, April 24, 2015, <http://time.com/3835074/kim-kardashian-west-armenian-genocide/>.

The trip brought as “much attention to the century-old Armenian genocide as that atrocity has ever received in pop culture,” with the numerous news stories on the trip, paparazzi images of the sisters out and about in Armenia, and the accompanying television episode of the family’s reality show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, bringing the genocide into the consciousness of viewers who might otherwise be unaware of it.⁷ Yet, because this and other news on celebrity politics appear alongside gossip stories and because celebrities can (and do) say stupid things, it makes it easier to discount celebrities as illegitimate and overlook them as potentially influential political agents. However, this logic ignores the powerful position of celebrities, who through existing media attention and branding are able to inform the politics of average citizen-subjects. Delineating the form celebrity politics take in contemporary America and asking how they function, this project examines the way that celebrity politics ‘speak’ to (and for) ordinary citizens in the public sphere.

The Public Celebrity/Celebrity Publics

Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is, they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the individual. They do so complexly, variously—they are not straightforward affirmations of individualism. On the contrary, they articulate both the promise and the difficulty that the notion of individuality presents for all of us who live by it.

Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*⁸

Celebrity is often framed as an innate quality of being—celebrities are naturally gifted and talented, deserving of our adoration. Chris Rojek terms this understanding of celebrity “subjectivism,” arguing that such accounts “fasten on the putative singularity of

⁷ Which, if you had installed #KardBlock onto your computer, you might have missed entirely.

⁸ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film and Film Stars*, 10.

personal characteristics,” which zero in on talent as “a unique, ultimately inexplicable phenomenon.”⁹ Celebrities are born destined to be celebrities. While the contemporary proliferation of reality television ‘stars’ such as the Kardashians has shifted this framing slightly, it still largely holds fast for film and television actors, musicians, and (to a certain degree) athletes. Rather than understanding celebrity as a result of natural talent, I ground this project in framing celebrity as a socio-cultural construct, which is therefore never neutral and should be understood as having a historically contingent ideological, political, and economic make-up—making the perceived ‘innateness’ of celebrity a result of this construction. Various theorists associated with the Frankfurt School, including Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, advance such a framing of celebrity. In “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” Horkheimer and Adorno suggest the theory that the celebrity manipulates the masses by perpetuating the false promises of capitalism: while we are all sold the individualized possibility we can reach the stars—and we therefore identify with them—very few will actually reach the ranks of celebrity.¹⁰ Similarly, Marcuse also believes that celebrities manipulate the masses, arguing in *One-Dimensional Man* that they prime the individual to accept the oppressive modern, industrial society.¹¹ For Marcuse, celebrity can be understood as a site of false value or false need, an invention of society that not only works against our true or vital needs (such as nourishment or clothing) but represses them—the free individual is lost in this quest. While the assessment of celebrity by these members of the

⁹ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, 29.

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 94-136.

¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.

Frankfurt School might be partially accurate, these antecedents to contemporary definitions of celebrity provide a rather pessimistic and narrow view of the way that the socio-culturally constructed celebrity functions, thus having limited application in the present.¹²

The work of individuals like Richard Dyer, Graeme Turner, and Joshua Gamson are useful in providing a less narrow definition of celebrity with which to work. While indebted to, and at times sharing, the manipulation theory of celebrity advanced by some of the Frankfurt School theorists, these scholars open up the definition in such a way as to allow for a broader understanding of celebrity across time and place. As Graeme Turner notes, celebrity is embedded within “a variously determined field of cultural relations, not a set of invariate structures, and the attempt to read off its political function or the cultural meanings it appears to privilege has to be contextualized within particular historical conjunctures.”¹³ How celebrity is defined, understood, and deployed is historically determined and as such subject to change. Turner therefore believes that it is “the detail that matters” when we attempt to define celebrity and understand the various roles they play.¹⁴

Richard Dyer makes a similar case in *Stars*, where he argues that the celebrity is not a ‘real’ person but a product of the media industry—the star is a commodity image, pieced together from advertising, magazines, television, film, and the like.¹⁵ Dyer

¹² And rather obviously, the Frankfurt School’s definition of celebrity is itself historically contingent, reflecting the moment in which they were writing.

¹³ Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 118.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ This argument is played out in variation in *Heavenly Bodies*.

approaches celebrity as a structured, polysemic text.¹⁶ Dyer argues that an ideological analysis of celebrities such as his own brings to focus “the finite multiplicity of meaning and affects they embody and the attempt so to structure them that some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked or displaced.”¹⁷ Dyer’s approach to stardom as ‘structured polysemy’ stresses the fact that the ‘star-image’ both *contains* and is *structured* in ‘meaning and affects,’ highlighting both the complexity of the image(s) and the fact that they contain a variety of meanings, which oftentimes are contradictory.¹⁸ In short, Dyer makes the argument that the celebrity, rooted in social meaning, is historically overdetermined. A celebrity’s meaning is also conditional on and related to the audience, allowing for the celebrity image to serve as a potential means to control or resolve ideological and social contradictions. While Dyer’s understanding of celebrity has the ability to sway in the direction of manipulation theory like Frankfurt School, there is room for negotiation between audience, celebrity, and the media or other institutional loci of power (the very sites responsible for selling and perpetuating the false promises of celebrity for Frankfurt School theorists). Therefore it is not strictly or only a manipulative relationship.

In *Claims to Fame* Joshua Gamson attempts to take on American celebrity culture, developing an understanding of contemporary celebrity through the cultural

¹⁶It is important to note at the outset that Dyer’s work is not just about stardom (or celebrity) generally, but privileges the *film* star.

¹⁷ Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 3.

¹⁸ Although Dyer only implicitly makes a connection between the star and Marx’s commodity-form, Barry King explicitly does so—arguing that it occurs through the process of ‘personification.’ King, “The star and the commodity: Notes towards a performance theory of stardom,” in *Cultural Studies*, 1, 2.

fields of “discourse, production, and audiences.”¹⁹ While his concern is not with providing a definition of celebrity, his attention to such cultural fields point to the contingent nature of celebrity. Like Gamson, my concern is not with developing a definition of celebrity—this has been sufficiently covered by others in ways that are useful.²⁰ However, because this project develops an understanding of how celebrity works in the political public sphere, it is necessary to situate it accordingly; marking celebrity as socially, historically, and culturally contingent becomes an important starting point.

Fundamental to the functioning of celebrity in contemporary American culture is the public sphere. As Michael Warner writes, “The notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity.”²¹ I argue that celebrities can and do serve as these texts; celebrities become points of unity for discrete individuals, a role presently compounded and heightened by the Internet vis-à-vis social media. Warner suggests that mass culture, through what he conceptualizes as a mass public sphere, offers a compensatory alternative for those denied access to the bourgeois public sphere theorized by Jürgen Habermas, which through its exclusionary practices required a denial of the body or a type of disembodiment.²² For Warner, the mass public sphere allows for the development of a more inclusive subjectivity, a mass subjectivity.

¹⁹ Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*, 6.

²⁰ Turner’s *Understanding Celebrity* being a recent example of this.

²¹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 11-12.

²² Although by its very definition the idea of a public sphere suggests inclusivity—to be public is understood to be open to all—the public sphere, as Habermas defines it, would necessarily be exclusive, made up of educated, bourgeois, male subjects which, in turn, would serve to reinforce the status quo. It is

The inclusivity of the mass public sphere for Warner occurs in part because mass culture allows for the prosthetic body (or specifically, for the purposes of this project, the body of the celebrity) to take the place of real bodies lost in the “utopian self abstraction” of the bourgeois public sphere.²³ The visible public figure of the celebrity has an iconicity through which an individual can identify and it is through this identification that the mass public subject is created. We can all, equally, live amid the everyday extravagance of Kim Kardashian-West or find fulfillment in the charitable works of Angelina Jolie-Pitt. The mass public sphere therefore allows for an endless differentiation of self, as a “public, after all, cannot have a discrete, positive existence, something becomes a public only through its availability for subjective identification.”²⁴ The discourse of the bourgeois public sphere, although addressed to someone, is addressed to nobody in particular and a reconciliation of this disjuncture between embodiment and self-abstraction is promised by the mass public sphere and mass subjectivity.²⁵ Various forms of mass culture—including celebrities—thus work to interpellate subjects as part of mass audiences and by “consuming the thematic materials of mass media discourse, persons construct themselves as its mass subject.”²⁶

Warner is not necessarily interested in maintaining the relationship of the public sphere to politics or the political. Unlike Habermas, for whom the bourgeois public

on this point of exclusivity that often serves as a point of contention for other scholars of the public sphere. See: Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere* ed. Bruce Robbins; and Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun.

²³ Michael Warner “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” 241.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 247.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

sphere is decidedly political as it historically represented a space for private people to come together to engage in the type of rational-critical debate and discourse among equals previously relegated only to sites of authority, Warner argues that making one's self part of a public does not have to correspond with making one's self political.²⁷ While I would not disagree with Warner's position, I would argue that it does not mean politicization is not a *potential* within the contemporary mediated public sphere. This is particularly true if the celebrities available for the individual to identify with are circulated in such a way that focuses on their politics—as is the case in the present moment where mobile technologies and the Internet, coupled with more traditional forms of mass media, have enabled non-stop documentation of all aspects of celebrity life, including politics. Average citizen-subjects can therefore be interpellated as political or politicized subjects through their participation in this public sphere. This creates a contemporary mediated public sphere that draws from Habermas' vision of the necessarily political aspects of the bourgeois public sphere (without the same sort of exclusionary requirements for participation) as well as Warner's theorization of a less specifically political mass public sphere made up of mass subjects.²⁸ However, the specific ways in which celebrities interpellate subjects as part of a mediated (political) public sphere varies.

As P. David Marshall notes, part of what makes a celebrity a celebrity is precisely this engagement with and relationship to the mediated public sphere. Therefore, while:

²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 27.

²⁸ This is in full acknowledgment that Habermas pinpoints the decline of the public sphere with the rise of mass culture. Instead of a public sphere, mass culture has created a "mediated public," which Habermas sees as a "nonpublic." *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 247.

The public subject may be produced by the cinematic experience and may derive its originary power from the fictional film text's construction of ideal self...the celebrity element of the star is its transcendence of the text in whatever form.²⁹

Although the case can and has been made that there is a difference between types of celebrity—actors are different than musicians and vice versa —this distinction ceases to be important, to return to Warner, as celebrities are circulated and consumed in the public sphere through various forms of media, including the Internet. Even though it would seem that an actor is playing a role on television and is his or her self off-screen whereas a musician is always his or herself, this assumes that a musician does not also have a stage persona. In either case however it is the maneuverability of the actor or musician in the public sphere that makes him or her a celebrity—this is also what distinguishes the celebrity citizen from an ordinary citizen. Further I contend that the difference between the celebrity musician and the celebrity actor increasingly ceases to matter in the contemporary American public sphere, as media coverage—which helps to determine who is (and stays) present or relevant in the public sphere and therefore a celebrity—collapses different forms of celebrity into one another. While I know Taylor Swift is a musician, as a result of media coverage I do not actively distinguish her from any of the other members of her squad, which is made up of other female celebrities, including model Cara Delevingne and actress Lena Dunham.³⁰ Increasingly we think less about the distinctions between types of celebrity and instead consider them all as celebrities whom we like or dislike for various reasons (the television, films, or music

²⁹ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, 14.

³⁰ “The Beginner’s Guide to Taylor Swift’s Girl Squad,” *Vanity Fair*, September 2015, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/photos/2015/08/taylor-swift-karlie-kloss-girl-squad-guide>.

they make potentially but not necessarily factoring in to this equation). This makes the politics of all types of celebrities equally influential (or not) in the political opinions of ordinary citizens, with what we know about a celebrity as a ‘person’ making more of an impact in how we perceive his or her politics. This project therefore reflects these shifts in perception, considering various types of celebrity equally.

Celebrities possess power or leverage within the public sphere. As Marshall notes, the status of ‘celebrity’ “confers on the person a certain discursive power: within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the media system as being legitimately significant.”³¹ This plays an obviously important factor in celebrity politics: as ‘legitimately significant’ individuals, celebrities not only have louder voices (making their political positions more easily and regularly heard) but such legitimacy also gives them access to channels of state power that are often unavailable to ordinary citizens, such as private meetings with the President or other elected officials, invitations to speak before Congress, and (perhaps most obviously) open access to news coverage. Celebrities are also conferred a type of affective power; the celebrity “represents a site for the housing of affect in terms of both the audience and the institutions that have worked to produce the cultural forms that have allowed the celebrity to develop.”³²

Celebrities are marked by various forms of media as worthy of our attention and care—the celebrity is framed as an influential model of the ideal individual. However, such a focus on even the minutiae of celebrity lives also serves to make us overly familiar

³¹ Marshall, *Celebrity Power*, x.

³² *Ibid.*, 74.

with the celebrities around us—they are normalized or domesticated, made every day. This process of normalization is compounded by the increase in personal (but still public) social media use by (or on behalf of) celebrities: I can see Amanda Seyfried’s dogs wearing birthday hats, a video of Beyoncé riding a bike, or Chris Pratt’s wife (a celebrity in her own right) and son on the porch swing in front of their house.³³ These glimpses into the ‘real lives’ of celebrities are important in that the spectator-fan feels connected: attending an animal birthday party, riding a bike, and sitting on a porch swing are all things I have either done or personally witnessed others doing in my everyday life. As the celebrity becomes normalized, they also become relatable. This allows for the cultivation of emotional relationships through such circulation in the public sphere. Celebrities, in essence become both extra *and* ordinary through this process of media scrutiny and social media circulation. This simultaneous positioning of the celebrity as (extra) ordinary is important to celebrity politics as it makes it easier for celebrities to both harness our attention and use this attention to try to stimulate an affective response.

Amorphous and slippery, affect is difficult to conclusively define.³⁴ According to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, affect is:

...the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.³⁵

³³ <https://instagram.com/p/79Tf8USdhW/>; <https://instagram.com/p/9d4VazPwyI/>; and <https://instagram.com/p/2zaN0tjHPj/?taken-by=prattprattpratt>.

³⁴ Affect is commonly referred to as “amorphous” by those attempting to describe it.

³⁵ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader* ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 1.

Affect is both related to emotion, to feeling of some sort—but never fully capable of only being expressed in the realm of emotion, because affect is both something that moves the mind or physical body of the individual in some way *and* the social experience of being moved. In other words, affect moves and accordingly affects others. It is in this that affect has political possibility; as Alison Landsberg suggests, what makes affect have political significance is “not so much what it *is* as what it *does*.”³⁶ Unable to be fully regulated by rational or socially constructed conditions, affect has the power to compel bodies towards new political thought or action.³⁷ Affect is a well of political *potential*. Taking my cue from Marshall, celebrities, I contend, are positioned in such a way as to allow for the attribution of affect.³⁸ Celebrities, therefore, are uniquely capable of catalyzing affect in average citizen-subjects, of attempting to capitalize on this well of political potential. However, because affect is so difficult to define, it is equally difficult to measure; it is hard to pinpoint the moment that an affective response has actually occurred. Therefore, I am most interested in the ways in which celebrities *aim* to catalyze affect in average citizen-subjects, in how they use their platform as celebrities to compel average citizen-subjects to be moved, to think about or act on a given political issue and to form political connections with others. And, at the current moment, one of the sites in which these attempts by celebrities to cultivate affect for political purposes plays out is in the public sphere.

³⁶ Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, 18.

³⁷ Seigworth, Gregg, Landsberg, and others trace this theorization of affect to Baruch Spinoza and the concept of the “not yet.” Seigworth and Gregg, “An Inventory or Shimmers;” and Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*.

³⁸ Marshall, *Celebrity Power*, 74.

Many scholarly critiques that consider the intersection of celebrity and politics engage, encourage, and perpetuate the categorization of celebrity politics into simplistic binary arrangements. Such categorization is also replicated in celebrity media coverage. Examples of such binaries include: the positioning of celebrity politics as either something to be celebrated or sneered at, the excessive focus on the political orientation of individual celebrities (democrat vs. republican or liberal vs. conservative), or the depiction of celebrities as either a shill in the capitalist machine or the willing perpetrators of capitalism's injustices.³⁹ While all of these binaries might at times be true or important, my argument is that they serve to obscure the actual form and ramifications of said politics. This in turn erases from the discourse surrounding celebrity politics the nuanced effects and degree of significance played by such factors as power, privilege, and authority—creating a single, monolithic (and unchanging) category of celebrity politics. In other words, by overly focusing on the fact *that* celebrities participate in politics, we lose sight of both the form that these politics take and how they function in the world, so to speak.

Through an analysis of distinct moments of twenty-first century celebrity politics, this project attempts to recapture the form of said politics by identifying three models that are most commonplace: liberal democratic, neoliberal, and hybrid (an attempt to pursue liberal democratic aims through a neoliberal framework). Far from appearing out of nowhere, these three models should be understood as articulations of wider American political trends. As I believe that celebrities both model existing political possibilities

³⁹ For an example of a critique that engages in all three binary reductions, see Timothy Stanley, *Citizen Hollywood*.

and work to create or foreclose on new political possibilities for average citizen-subjects, such a framework is important as it enables the type of analysis necessary to understand precisely this relationship. As I will show throughout, each model relies on the positionality of the celebrity in different ways, all of which center on the celebrity's cultural capital and the affective relationship cultivated between ordinary and celebrity citizens. Furthermore, while other scholarship has addressed neoliberal celebrity politics it has positioned said neoliberalism as unwavering; what distinguishes this project is that it approaches each primary example as a distinct moment of politics. To give a specific example, while Matt Damon's involvement in Not on Our Watch is an example of neoliberal celebrity politics, his participation in Artists United for Winning Without war is an example of liberal democratic celebrity politics. Making space for political flexibility within a single celebrity actor allows for a broader understanding of the way in which an individual celebrity can potentially model complex and at times conflicting political possibilities. Only by understanding the form(s) that celebrity politics take can we begin to assess the effect that celebrities have on the political public sphere.

Map of the Stars

Celebrity political participation has become so commonplace in contemporary American life that it has become unremarkable. However, this is in fact a recent development. Therefore, before moving into an analysis of celebrity politics in the present, it becomes necessary to understand the way(s) in which American celebrity politics have evolved across time and space. The first chapter maps out this history of American celebrity politics over the last century, focusing on particular moments of celebrity politics which I

have identified as representative or significant, in order to trace the rise of the celebrity as a political figure. As becomes clear, the celebrity as political agent and the celebrity's use of his or her own cultural capital as political leverage that we are accustomed to has been a relatively recent development, taking shape primarily over the second half of the twentieth century. This shift in the role of the celebrity in politics largely follows the overall change in the political situation of late-capitalism identified by Jodi Dean. As she argues, what counts as political has changed: "[E]verything seems political because the political is not confined to one specific location or set of actions." Dean pinpoints this shift as beginning to occur in the 1960s, wherein various social movements "targeted families, media, churches, schools, medicine, consumption, identity, and sexuality, making specific economic, cultural and social practices political," which is precisely when celebrities begin to become more actively involved in politics as independent political agents. The three chapters that follow move from chapter one's focus on the twentieth century to twenty-first century celebrity politics, looking especially at the political form and contours of such politics. As they do not exist in a vacuum, twenty-first century celebrity politics borrow from and are influenced by more general contemporary political formations, thus my grouping celebrity politics into liberal democratic, neoliberal, and hybrid models.

Chapter two uses the post-9/11 celebrity anti-war movement to anchor a discussion of the liberal democratic celebrity political model. Defining the primary concerns of liberal democratic celebrity politics as issues pertaining to rights, equality, and justice, I look at the way anti-war organizations such as Artists United for Winning

Without War and Not in Our Name and the wave of anti-war films released in the decade after 9/11 framed an anti-war standpoint through such a lens. This framing was, in turn, used as an attempt to galvanize the collective whole (ordinary citizens and celebrity citizens alike) to work within, on, and with the state in order to foster and maintain a healthy, functioning social body. Arguing that within the liberal democratic model the positionality of the celebrity is convertible into actionable forms of political leverage, through these examples I show the various ways that the celebrity serves: as a point of inspiration for the politicization of average citizen-subjects, a bridge between the state and its citizens, and as allies that exist outside of the institutional political sphere but with an equivalence of power and influence. In particular, I consider the ways in which celebrities sought to leverage their cultural capital so as to give a presence to a political position and cultural war narrative that ran counter to the dominant-hegemonic narrative in ways that they hoped would resonate with average citizen-subjects.

Chapter three develops the neoliberal celebrity political model through examples of the various ways that celebrities mobilized to respond to the crisis in Darfur and through the visual image of the celebrity body engaged in the act of humanitarianism. Taking it as a given that celebrity neoliberalism, like neoliberalism more generally, works to foster and legitimate inequality and capitalism through the application of an economic reason to all aspects of life, I am more interested in how celebrity neoliberalism advances and privileges an ideology of individualism—whose rights, desires, and well-being come ahead of that of the social whole—and in the ways that this model is fundamentally (and in various ways) depoliticizing. I argue that this makes what could otherwise be a

political or rational appeal to average citizen-subjects an emotional one, based on a language of morals and ethics. As such, the celebrities involved in this model tend to draw on a well of affective potential (both their own and that of the general public) as the solution to national and international crises and tragedies rather than solely relying on the state. I consider the ways in which the celebrity body serves as a catalyst for an affective response to humanitarian crisis, arguing that such visual rhetoric, which relies on the familiar celebrity in an unfamiliar context, allows for celebrities to serve as both an antidote to image fatigue—redrawing our attention to crises—while simultaneously directing attention away from the historical and structural causes of these crises. Morality replaces politics.

In the final chapter I take up what I have termed “hybrid” celebrity politics, which I identify as an endeavor to bring together liberal democratic and neoliberal celebrity politics—hybrid celebrity politics appear as a path through and between these other two political models. Focused, like liberal democratic celebrity politics, on issues of rights and equality, hybrid celebrity politics attempt to pursue these aims through a neoliberal framework. Privileging the neoliberal ideology of individualism and the cultivation of an affect as a strategic response to problems results in hybrid celebrity politics taking up identity-based causes, revolving in particular around issues linked to gender, race, and sexuality. Looking at three primary examples, the NOH8 Campaign, the It Gets Better Project, and the Happy Hippie Foundation, I argue that while all three organizations rely on images and narratives of the individual and his or her quest to gain or maintain rights

as a way of not only forging points of solidarity but also helping work towards collective equality, this political approach is inherently monodirectional.

Ultimately, hybrid politics are about the individual celebrity speaking both for us and on our behalf. As I illustrate, this is in large part due to the relationship between affect and the ‘normalcy’ of the celebrities involved. While other celebrity political models might rely on our emotional investment in celebrity X, Y, or Z to help create a sense of political investment, hybrid celebrity politics in particular stress the identity of the celebrities as both extraordinary and ordinary individuals as an important factor in our and their political investment. We know and regularly are told/shown through the constant barrage of media coverage that celebrities are both special and just like us. We become almost intimately familiar with the celebrities in our lives. This seemingly contradictory positionality of the celebrity in turn is precisely what triggers the affective political response of ordinary citizens—I should be moved to think about women’s rights because Emma Watson, who is extraordinary, does. However, Emma Watson cares about women’s rights because she is average—her investment in this political issue is evidence that she is just like me. Because we have come to believe that a particular celebrity is just like us, they therefore have the same political needs, wants, and concerns. Therefore, it seems logical that the celebrity body can fill in for our ordinary citizen bodies and can speak not just on our behalf but also for and as us. This is different than both the liberal democratic or neoliberal models, which, other differences aside, both maintain the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary.

Acknowledging that hybrid celebrity politics, like arguably all political models, has its weaknesses, I conclude this project by suggesting that they serve an important purpose: they make a place for the political—to bring back the focus on rights, equality, and justice that underpins liberal democratic celebrity politics—in a neoliberal cultural climate steadily working to undermine and eliminate it. If in fact neoliberalism aims to do away with liberal democracy, as Wendy Brown argues in “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” then these emerging political forms that attempt to resuscitate that which has been and is becoming lost are especially important—that is if we wish to continue to have any sort of mainstream political dialogue centered around rights and justice that is connected to, instead of divorced from, notions of collectivity and the well-being of the social whole. And, even if liberal democratic politics are still a viable option in America, having another mainstream political model that works towards similar goals would seem important. As much as there is to criticize about the ways in which politics, social media, and celebrities intersect, the positive potentiality of this intersection is worth considering. Celebrities have the capacity to serve as a facilitator of debate, aiding in the development of a (hopefully) politically minded public sphere, in which participation can then instigate average citizen-subjects to work alongside celebrities for change. While celebrity and ordinary citizen alike are clearly engaged in differing degrees or forms of an affective response, this response has the potential to be converted to something beyond the realm of the affect. As I point out however, affect plays a key role in both our relationship with celebrities and in their approach to politics. Although celebrities might initially contribute to the development of a political public

sphere, for them to be true, progressive agents of social change, there must be a point where emotion is converted to reason, lest the former undermine the latter. Therefore, I argue that the next move for celebrities—if they are actually invested in politics—is to work to re-channel emotion, the necessary initial fuel for political motivation, into concrete, practical ideas and action.

Chapter One: Celebrity Politics, A Brief History

Celebrity political participation has become so commonplace in contemporary American life that it has come to be expected. Mainstream network and cable news cover celebrity politics with regularity. News stories about celebrity politics appear in almost every print newspaper and news magazine. There is even an entire page on the *Huffington Post* website dedicated to tracking the causes celebrities hold most dear and documenting the political activism and opinions of actors and musicians, where, for example, we can learn that Brad Pitt and Russell Simmons “praise” President Obama’s “marijuana evolution,” that Sean Penn believes that the “whole f—king world” abandoned Haiti after it was struck by an earthquake in 2010, or that Eddie Vedder “almost wishes bad things upon” the opponents of gun control.⁴⁰ Entitled “Political Hollywood,” the *Huffington Post* page exists in addition to the “Entertainment” and “Celebrity” pages, which of course also include stories on celebrity politics.⁴¹ However, celebrities only became active frontrunners in the political public sphere, working to make political causes visible,

⁴⁰ Kia Makarechi, “Brad Pitt On Obama & Pot: Actor Joins John Legend, Russell Simmons In Praising President’s Marijuana Evolution,” *The Huffington Post*, December 20, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/20/brad-pitt-obama-pot-john-legend-russell-simmons-marijuana_n_2337504.html?utm_hp_ref=political-hollywood; Christopher Rosen, “Sean Penn At Cannes: Haiti Was Abandoned By ‘Whole F—king World’,” *The Huffington Post*, May 18, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/18/sean-penn-at-cannes-haiti_n_1527757.html?utm_hp_ref=political-hollywood; Christopher Rosen, “Eddie Vedder On Gun Control Opponents: ‘I Almost Wish Bad Things Upon These People,’” *The Huffington Post*, October 9, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/09/eddie-vedder-gun-control_n_4059887.html?utm_hp_ref=political-hollywood.

⁴¹ <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/political-hollywood/4/>

educate the public, and attempting to instigate change in the latter half of the century—a position that is taken for granted in our present moment. Therefore, in order to understand celebrity politics in the present, it becomes necessary to understand the way(s) in which American celebrity politics have evolved across time and space.

The following brief history of the last century of American celebrity politics is an attempt to trace the rise of the celebrity as a political figure. It will look at particular moments of celebrity politics that I see as representative or significant. In so doing it aims to achieve two things. First, this history should show that the understanding and leveraging of celebrity as a form of political agency has been a relatively recent development, taking shape over the second half of the twentieth century as what counted as political opened up. And second, that celebrity politics before the turn of the twenty-first century were almost always clustered around concurrent social movements and political activities undertaken by average citizen-subjects. Even though this primarily reads as a documentation of the political history of Hollywood celebrities, where appropriate musicians have also been included in the narrative. Whereas musicians and Hollywood actors are equally considered to be celebrities in modern America, this has not always been the case. As the twentieth century progressed musicians had an increasingly more prominent presence in celebrity politics—reflecting a cultural shift in the understanding of the musical performer as just popular within their respective musical genre to being a celebrity in their own rights.

The Golden Age: Celebrity Political Activism Under the Studio System

Prior to the 1960s, celebrity political activism could be generally typified as neutral; celebrities would, at least publicly, affiliate themselves with the safest and socially acceptable of causes. As Lisa Ann Richey, the author of *Brand Aid*, suggests, “two world wars, music and film’s escapist entertainment of the 1930s, and the post-World War II anticommunist witch hunt in the United States worked against artists taking up prominent controversial social causes...”⁴² There were obviously exceptions to this general public political neutrality at both the individual and collective levels. However, celebrities who openly affiliated themselves with, let alone participated in, politics that either went against national political trends or veered towards either extreme when it was unpopular to do so could find themselves publicly censured, at best.

The nineteen-teens and twenties, the period in which Hollywood was starting to become the epicenter for filmmaking, gave rise to some of the earliest political appearances by film stars; specifically, where the power of film celebrity was being drawn upon to publicly support government programs or endorse political candidates. During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson deputized Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford as part of a drive to increase the sales of war bonds.⁴³ The Liberty Loan Bond campaign, which lasted from 1917-1919, is particularly significant because it marks the first occurrence of a structured and systematic alliance between the state and film stars, in which celebrities contributed both their ‘star-image’ and actual

⁴² Lisa Ann Richey, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World*, 48.

⁴³ Other film stars, including Marie Dressler, joined them at various point on the liberty bond campaign. See Ronald Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter: The Hollywood—Washington Connection*, 7; Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*, 11-51; and Alan Schroeder, *Celebrity-In-Chief: How Show Business Took Over the White House*, 17-18.

physical-self towards the war-effort.⁴⁴ The campaign positioned the associated film stars as trendsetters and opinion-makers; Chaplin and Pickford were, at the time, the two highest paid screen actors in Hollywood, drawing large crowds at all their war bond appearances.⁴⁵ According to a *Washington Post* article chronicling the launch of the third liberty loan campaign, the stars were all “suffering from severe attacks of writer’s cramps this morning as a result of signing their names thousands of times to subscription blanks,” as “practically all who could manage to wedge their way through the crowd...subscribed to bonds.”⁴⁶

In association with their physical appearances supporting the Liberty Loan Bond Campaign, Chaplin, Douglas, and Fairbanks invested their own money in bonds, as well as appeared in photographs, trailers, and films for the bonds that supported the war-effort in general.⁴⁷ Over the course of the three main campaigns, “17,500 sets of slides, 3 slides to a set, were distributed to as many theaters...” and the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (in conjunction with the Liberty Loan publicity committee) also “released 17,200 trailers, 17,200 sets of posters, and a ‘splendid patriotic film contributed by Douglas Fairbanks.’”⁴⁸ Charlie Chaplin also made a propaganda film for the Liberty Loan publicity committee to further the sales of war bonds.⁴⁹ Made at Chaplin’s own

⁴⁴ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Reknown: Fame & Its History*, 556-557.

⁴⁵ See for example: “8,000 People Buy Bonds From Charlie Chaplin,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 18, 1918, 1.

⁴⁶ “Surge To Buy Bonds: D.C. Residents Pledge More than \$3,000,000 to Third Loan,” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1918, 8.

⁴⁷ Many of these trailers and short films were anti-German, such as the 1918’s *Swat the Kaiser*, starring Fairbanks and directed by Joseph Henabery. See also Jas. S. McQuade, “Kleine’s Fourth Liberty Loan Trailers,” *The Moving Picture World* 38:2 (1918), 211.

⁴⁸ Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism: The Movies and World War I*, 118.

⁴⁹ See Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*; and DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism*, 119.

expense, *The Bond* equated Liberty bonds with other important social bonds, such as the bonds of matrimony, friendship, and love.⁵⁰ As Larry Wayne Ward notes, collectively film stars “proved to be some of the most effective bond salespeople that the country possessed.”⁵¹

Mary Pickford and Fairbanks, along with screen and theater actors Al Jolson, Blanche Ring, and a variety of Broadway performers, were active supporters of Republican presidential candidate Senator Warren G. Harding in the 1920 presidential campaign. Holding a rally for Harding in his hometown of Marion, Ohio that attracted half of the population, Jolson led a delegation of fifty Broadway performers in dance routines and songs whose lyrics extolled Harding’s virtues.⁵² However, Harding distanced himself from the entertainment industry after being elected President—and the other Presidents during this period, Coolidge and Hoover, never attempted to form a relationship with celebrities and the entertainment industry.⁵³

By the 1930s, the Hollywood studio system had reached full maturation and the benefit of celebrity endorsement and tangential political involvement became increasingly evident to politicians and other government officials. Franklin Roosevelt capitalized on the celebrity backing of such film stars as Katherine Hepburn, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, and Will Rogers in his 1932 presidential campaign.⁵⁴ Post-election, Rogers continued to voice his support of the Roosevelt administration and its New Deal

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Larry Wayne Ward, *The Motion Picture Goes to War: The U.S. Government Film Effort During World War I*, 52.

⁵² Schroeder, *Celebrity-In-Chief*, 115-116.

⁵³ Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics: Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications*, 42.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43. See also Lary May, *The big tomorrow: Hollywood and the politics of the American way*.

reform projects, using his radio show as a political platform. As Lary May notes, “by 1933 commentators referred to Rogers as the ‘Number One New Dealer.’”⁵⁵ Roosevelt was savvy in his appropriation of Hollywood celebrity, understanding that if actors and actresses stood behind the administration’s public works programs and participated in election campaigns he could only serve to benefit, even if just by name association.⁵⁶ At the same time, Roosevelt always retained at least a degree of separation between the worlds of politics and celebrity entertainment. Although by 1940 big-name celebrities such as Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda, Humphery Bogart, Lucille Ball, and Groucho Marx were openly campaigning for Roosevelt—paying to run full-page ads in the *New York Times* and hosting *Salute to Roosevelt* radio shows—Roosevelt maintained “physical separation” from celebrities.⁵⁷ It was during this period that charges of liberal political bias in Hollywood, something that would become a familiar trope in later years, were first leveled—most notably, right-leaning celebrities made these initial accusations.⁵⁸

The mid 1930s also saw the rise of anti-Nazi and anti-fascist sentiment in Hollywood with the founding of a variety of organizations, most notably the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL), which formed in 1936.⁵⁹ A Popular Front front-group—a

⁵⁵ May, 45.

⁵⁶ See Schroeder, *Celebrity-In-Chief*; and Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*. The Hollywood Democratic Committee (HDC), at times also called the “Hollywood for Roosevelt Committee,” was formed expressly to support Roosevelt in his election campaigns of 1936, 1940, and 1944

⁵⁷ Schroeder, *Celebrity-In-Chief*, 116-120.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁹ The full name was the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League for the Defense of Democracy. David Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators: Hollywood and the Coming of World War II*, 34. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in 1939—which allied Germany and Russia, no communist-backed organization was allowed to pose opposition to Nazism; HANL’s name was first changed to “Hollywood League for Democratic Action” and then to the “American Peace Mobilization.”

connection which it seems some members were aware of while others were not, as a small minority of members of HANL were also members of the Hollywood Communist Party—HANL attracted individuals across the spectrum of the entertainment industry, including actors, producers, screenwriters, radio personalities, dancers, and the like. As David Welky notes, “Hollywood loved pageantry and stars. Mass rallies and cocktail parties with big-name guest speakers provided both” and that the celebrity involvement in HANL and associated organizations principally served the functional equivalent of “window dressing.”⁶⁰ The recruitment of celebrities to the cause of the Popular Front “allowed for them to publicize an anti-fascist agenda throughout the US media,” capitalizing on the celebrity spotlight, though much of the actual day-to-day heavy work of running the organization was left to anonymous members of the Popular Front.⁶¹ As director John Ford is quoted as saying in 1938, in regards to his rationale for participation in HANL, even after talk of the organization’s communist connections became more common, “May I express my whole-hearted desire to cooperate to the utmost of my ability with the Hollywood anti-Nazi League. If this be Communism, count me in.”⁶²

HANL was also notable for a few reasons. First, it was the first American anti-Nazi and anti-fascist organization that was not explicitly linked to Jews and did not have a primarily Jewish membership. Although other anti-Nazi organizations did not necessarily have the communist ties of HANL, more often than not they (unsurprisingly)

⁶⁰ Ibid. This is, of course, not unilaterally the case—the weekly anti-Nazi radio program, *Talent in Exile*, featured refugee and American celebrities. See “The Hollywood Anti-Nazi League Presents ‘Talent in Exile’ (WFKB, 1938),” <http://chiseler.org/post/61633691880/the-hollywood-anti-nazi-league-presents-talent-in>.

⁶¹ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 51; Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators*, 37.

⁶² Robert F. Vaughn, *Only Victims: A Study of Show Business Blacklisting*, 65.

had some sort of Jewish affiliation—like the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights. Second, although its membership was mainly made of individuals with left-leaning politics, it also attracted some conservative members because of its anti-Hitler, anti-fascist political agenda.⁶³ Finally, it is one of the only large-scale pre-1960s celebrity political organizations—let alone examples of organized celebrity politics—not tied to the state. Although connected to the Popular Front, initially these anti-Nazi and anti-fascist celebrities were not perceived as a threat to “American values,” as the emphasis on anti-Nazism and anti-fascism stressed pacifism and non-interventionism, both of which were in accord with dominant national political trends.⁶⁴ Therefore HANL’s politics, although technically radical, would have been perceived as politically acceptable.

HANL organized petitions, published a bi-weekly paper, and supported such activities as the boycott of Nazi-German products and businesses, the blockading of meetings of the Los Angeles German-American Bund, and the publicizing of the visit of fascists and fascist sympathizers to the greater Los Angeles area—such as the visit from Mussolini’s son in 1937 or German director Leni Riefenstahl in 1938.⁶⁵ As part of their anti-fascist agenda, most members of HANL also supported the Republican Loyalists fighting against Franco’s Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War and, in association with

⁶³ Although sources vary, the general consensus has HANL membership at 5,000 celebrities and Hollywood filmmakers, writers, and technicians.

⁶⁴ There were, however, some who feared that the celebrity focus on anti-Nazism would incite American militarism, potentially even causing war. See Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators*, 35-36.

⁶⁵ Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II*, 165; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*; “‘No Room,’ Says Hollywood Group to Hitler’s Friend,” *The Washington Post*, November 30, 1938, 4; and “Hollywood Ad Hits At Leni Riefenstahl: Anti-Nazi League Bids Industry Close Doors to Hitler Agent,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 1938, 15.

HANL, formed the Motion Picture Artists Committee to Aid Republican Spain, the Anti-Franco League, and a Hollywood branch of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee; combined they were able to raise roughly one million dollars and make various tangible donations to the Loyalist cause.⁶⁶

HANL was one of the first organizations to attract the attention of Martin Dies in 1939, chairman of the eponymous Dies Committee, which would later become the House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1946, a precursor to what would occur in earnest post-World War II.⁶⁷ In response to a scheduled trip to Los Angeles to investigate the organization's participation in communist activities, "urgent radio broadcasts, rallies, newsletters, and a nearly non-stop flurry of telegrams calling for the dissolution of the Dies Committee were sent to President Roosevelt and the US Speaker of the House..." on behalf of HANL.⁶⁸ The scheduled trip never occurred for lack of funds.⁶⁹ It should however be noted that many of the celebrities that Dies would have been investigating as either communists or communist dupes were the same people who were actively campaigning for Roosevelt and supporting his New Deal policies, thus providing them with a modicum of bargaining power. The same year of Dies' threatened investigation, Russia and Germany signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, making the two

⁶⁶ Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators*, 37.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 51-52; Rabidoux, *Hollywood Politicos, Then and Now: Who They Are, What They Want, Why It Matters*, 49-51. In an historical account of the period, Reynold Humphries shows that Martin Dies was "not opposed to Fascist regimes until they waged war on the US..." and that "Research has shown that Dies maintained close relations with various Fascist and anti-Semitic organizations which supported his single-minded attacks on subversives," including "the Ku Klux Klan, the pro-Nazi American Bund...and William Dudley Pelley, founder of the Fascist Silverhirts..." suggesting that HANL would have provided an attractive target for Dies for multiple reasons. Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History*, 77.

⁶⁸ Rabidoux, *Hollywood Politicos*, 50; and "Hollywood League Demands That 'Red' Charge Be Proved," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1938, 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

countries allies; this meant that no communist-backed organization was allowed to oppose Nazism. HANL underwent reorganization due to the loss of its connection to the Popular Front and, after multiple name changes and a further blow in the form of victory by Franco's Nationalists over the Republican Loyalists in Spain, eventually became the American Peace Mobilization before disbanding roughly around the time that the United States officially entered World War II.⁷⁰ However, the intense concerns of Martin Dies—and others in Washington—over communist infiltration of Hollywood were momentarily put aside for the more pressing concerns of the war.

The war years are perhaps less important to the broad history of American celebrity politics than the years immediately preceding and following them. However, it is worth noting that World War II saw the closest alignment between national and industry concerns than had existed before and after the war. Not only did celebrities such as Jimmy Stewart, Glenn Miller, and Clark Gable attempt to enlist in the military, but producers worked to have musicians record more patriotic songs and studios were also eager to release a wave of patriotic film reels, which were unconditionally uncritical of the home front and intent on inspiring the American people to win the war.⁷¹ Hollywood—both on and off the screen—and the nation shared in a victory culture, at least temporarily.⁷² And, more importantly, what the war years show was the broad acknowledgment of the power of celebrities to influence and sway the political views of

⁷⁰ Perhaps not surprisingly, conservative authors still contend that HANL (or the American Peace Mobilization) was a communist front organization even after 1939. See for example Paul Kengor, *Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century*; and "Howard Zinn's Dupes?," *American Thinker*, August 11, 2010, http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/howard_zinns_dupes.html.

⁷¹ May, *The big tomorrow*, 139.

⁷² See May, *The big tomorrow*, 139; and Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*.

ordinary citizens, serving as both behavioral trendsetters and models of ideology. While clearly not the first time that celebrity was leveraged for this purpose, this was a position that previously had only been taken sporadically by the state and entertainment industries and with localized application (selling war bonds or being used in presidential campaigns, for example). This understanding of the potential political power of celebrities to advance a political ideology or cause were also reflected in the deep-seated fears that there existed a relationship between communism and celebrity, a fear which came to fruition in the post-war years.

With the war over, by 1946 the concern over communist infiltration of Hollywood once again came to the forefront.⁷³ Although these years are significant for many reasons, they stand out in this historical period because they are an example of celebrity politics being actively debated in the public sphere and of the subsequent politicization of individual celebrities—which began with what would become known as the “Hollywood Blacklist.” Initially fueled by a *Hollywood Reporter* column by publisher and founder William R. Wilkerson, the “Hollywood Blacklist,” began in July of 1946. Entitled “A Vote for Joe Stalin,” the column named a series of screenwriters as communist sympathizers, with two more lists of sympathizers published in August and September of that same year.⁷⁴ By October of 1947, the lists compiled by Wilkerson in *The Hollywood*

⁷³ As Lary May points out, “what internal issues led HUAC to investigate the movie capital will probably never be fully known.” *The big tomorrow*, 196.

⁷⁴ In November 2012, Wilkerson’s son published an apology for what he refers to as “Hollywood’s Holocaust.” In his apology, he claims that his father’s motivation for starting the blacklisting was revenge against those who impeded his dreams of owning his own studio, writing, “At its very core, scapegoating is the gasoline that fuels the power, and every story of power cannot succeed without a good scapegoat. Billy Wilkerson’s story is no different.” W.R. Wilkerson III, “An Apology: The Son of THR Founder Billy Wilkerson on the Publication’s Dark Past,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 19, 2012,

Reporter became the grounds for HUAC to subpoena ten Hollywood screenwriters, directors, and producers—who became known as the “Hollywood Ten”—to testify at a series of hearings.⁷⁵ Reflecting the understanding of celebrities as (potentially) politically powerful and influential in the thinking of average citizen-subjects and driven by extreme reactionary agendas on the right, the goal of the HUAC hearings was to determine the degree of communist subversion in Hollywood in order to work towards stopping its spread. These hearings, which lasted ten days, opened with testimonies from Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan (who was the current head of the Screen Actors Guild); although both attested to the communist “menace,” Reagan believed that at least at that point “Hollywood could police itself; let democracy work without government interference.”⁷⁶ Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart, representing the newly formed Committee for the First Amendment (CFA), also testified at these initial hearings, but on behalf of the Hollywood Ten.⁷⁷

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/blacklist-billy-wilkersons-son-apologizes-391977>. See also: Gary Baum and Daniel Miller, “The Hollywood Reporter, After 65 Years, Addresses Role in Blacklist,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 19, 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/blacklist-thr-addresses-role-65-391931>.

⁷⁵The Hollywood Ten were: Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr, John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo.

⁷⁶Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 149; Baum and Miller, “The Hollywood Reporter, After 65 Years, Addresses Role in Blacklist;” and “Testimony of Walt Disney, U.S. Congress House Un-American Activities Committee, Hearings Regarding the Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry,” in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 146-157. Reagan’s position—both as a staunch anti-communist and on desiring as little government intervention as possible—would continue to develop until his election as US President in 1980.

⁷⁷Members of the CFA also included John Huston, Gene Kelly, Katherine Hepburn, Frank Sinatra, and William Wyler. Walt Disney had helped found the far more conservative Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals three years prior to the creation of the CFA. According to the Alliance’s Statement of Principals, “we find ourselves in sharp revolt against a rising tide of communism, fascism and kindred beliefs, that seek by subversive means to undermine and change this way of life; groups that have forfeited their right to exist in this country of ours...In our special field of motion pictures, we resent the growing impression that this industry is made of, and dominated by, Communists, radicals, and crackpots. We believe that we represent the vast majority of the people who serve this great medium of expression.

Ultimately, the HUAC hearings failed to produce concrete evidence that Hollywood was disseminating communist propaganda through its films; however, the Hollywood Ten refused to testify, were found in contempt of Congress, and sentenced to six months to one year in prison. Equally damning was their inclusion in the Waldorf Statement, issued by Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), on behalf of all members. The Waldorf Statement, in clear language, made it known that no studio would hire one of the Hollywood Ten or any identified member of the Communist Party, declaring:

...we will not re-employ any of the 10 until such time that he is acquitted or has purged himself of contempt and declares under oath that he is not a Communist...We will not knowingly employ a Communist or a member of any party or group which advocates the overthrow of the government...we are not going to be swayed by hysteria or intimidation from any source.⁷⁸

Although the Hollywood Ten attempted to appeal their convictions, they were rejected by a DC Court of appeals in June 1949 and in December of that same year the Supreme Court refused to hear further appeals.

Further accusations of communism were leveled, instigated in part by the publication of the *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* pamphlet in 1950 by the right-wing journal *Counterattack*, which listed 151 names in the entertainment industry as propagating a communist agenda—including Leonard Bernstein, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Edward R. Murrow, and Orson

But unfortunately it has been an unorganised majority.”

http://www.terramedia.co.uk/reference/documents/motion_picture_alliance.htm.

⁷⁸ Robert J. Bresler, *Freedom of Association: Rights and Liberties Under the Law*, 170. As Gary Baum and Daniel Miller point out, “none of the Ten...is known to have ever worked or advocated for the violent overthrow of the U.S. -- ostensibly the chief fear of anti-communist zealots,” “The Hollywood Reporter, After 65 Years, Addresses Role in Blacklist.”

Welles.⁷⁹ Many of those who appeared in the *Red Channels* pamphlet found themselves in front of HUAC for a second round of hearings in 1951; Will Geer and Pete Seeger, whose names were included in the pamphlet, were both blacklisted for many years as a result. Will Geer, an actor best known for his role in the 1970s TV show *The Waltons*, made very few films in the 1950s after he was blacklisted for his refusal to testify in front of HUAC. Folk musician Seeger, who also refused to testify, was found guilty of obstructing HUAC investigations and Decca Records dropped his folk group, the Weavers.⁸⁰

Although HUAC's investigation of communism in Hollywood lasted just over three years, roughly 320 members of the entertainment community were blacklisted and unable to work as a result of having to testify in hearings before they finally started to find themselves employed again in the early 1960s, and, according to Mark Wheeler, celebrity activists who were *not* blacklisted during this period essentially “withdrew themselves from political controversies” altogether.⁸¹ The blacklist period thrust the politics of celebrities—and thus, celebrity politics—into the public sphere for the first time. As will be discussed shortly, the studio system made any type of public display of radical (or, non-conformist) politics very difficult—particularly if employment wanted to be maintained. And, based on the experiences of Pete Seeger, for example, the recording industry had similar control over the politics of its musicians. Yes, some of the

⁷⁹ John McDonough, “Reliving The Scare: Looking Back On ‘Red Channels’,” June 22, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128005395>.

⁸⁰ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 52. Seeger's conviction was not overturned by a US Court of Appeal until 1962, and then only on a technicality. Seeger provides a perfect example of the difference between earlier and contemporary manifestations of celebrity politics when you juxtapose his blacklisting with the celebration of his life *and* his politics by the mainstream media after his death in January of 2014.

⁸¹ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 52.

celebrities who were blacklisted were actually active members of the Communist Party.⁸² However, for various reasons membership was not flaunted publicly nor did they incorporate their politics into their work—and it perhaps comes as no surprise that even after all this time no evidence of the communist messages that the Dies Committee and HUAC were positive were being secreted into films has been found. There were also those who found themselves in front of HUAC for whatever reason and, although not Party members, chose not to testify, becoming “unfriendly witnesses” and subject to blacklisting. In all cases, the celebrities who were caught up in the furor of blacklisting were publicly politicized against their will, by both the state and its citizens, making the blacklist years markedly different than the expressions of celebrity politics both before and after this historical juncture.

Historical Interlude: The Golden Age & The Breakup of the Studio System

The Hollywood studio system provides the backdrop for much of the history of the celebrity politics of actors that have been recounted in this chapter.⁸³ The breakup of the studio system, which lasted roughly from the late 1940s to the end of the 1950s, and was a result of two major lawsuits centering on antitrust issues in Hollywood, marks the beginning of a shift in celebrity political action and the development of a form of independent celebrity political agency. Therefore, it is important to step away from the

⁸² “Testimony of Ring Lardner, Jr., U.S. Congress House Un-American Activities Committee, Hearings Regarding the Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry,” in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 158-169; and Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist*.

⁸³ The political expression of musicians was clearly not under the control of the Hollywood studio system, but was instead subject to the specific record labels to which they were signed. However, the ‘music industry’—as we have commonly come to refer to it in the US—did not standardize in the same way as the studio system until *after* WWII and really ‘came of age’ during the cultural tumult of the 1960s.

chronology established thus far to briefly discuss both the two lawsuits as well as the conditions that existed under the studio system before segueing into more contemporary celebrity political formations.⁸⁴ This is because the conditions that existed prior to the breakup largely determined the nature and extent of the political involvement undertaken by most celebrities who existed within the studio system while the lawsuits that precipitated the end of the studio system enabled celebrities to become more independent political agents thereafter.⁸⁵

Often referred to as the Golden Age or Era of Hollywood cinema, the studio system lasted from roughly the end of the silent film era in the late 1920s to the mid 1950s; many commonly point to 1927's *The Jazz Singer*, the first film released with synchronized sound (albeit just a few moments), as the start of the studio era.⁸⁶ An oligopoly, in economic terms, and a functioning monopoly in terms of practice, Hollywood was essentially dominated by five main companies during this time period: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, and RKO Radio Pictures. According to Robert A. Brady, in reference to the reach of the major studios during this period, "One might regard the movie industry as dominated by a semi compulsory cartel...or even a 'community of interests' of a type that typically

⁸⁴ The studio system has often been equated with a factory system.

⁸⁵ Such as the examples of political involvement previously discussed

⁸⁶ It should be noted that some of the practices associated with the studio system—such as block booking—were established earlier than the studio system proper. The practice of block booking was when studios would require theaters to buy their films as a package, or block; if a theater wanted to purchase a film that would sell a lot of tickets at the box office, they would be required to also buy several B-films. Block booking was later known as "full-line forcing," when the pre-sold block no longer just included feature-length films, but newsreels and brief cartoons as well. The Federal Trade Commission began investigating charges of block booking as early as 1921. See Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*, 178.

stops short of the more readily indictable offenses under usual Anti-Trust procedure.”⁸⁷

The “Big Five,” the name often used to refer to these top five studios, were “fully integrated,” exercising control through vertical integration; they produced their own films, ran their own distribution, and owned or made allies with theater chains.⁸⁸

Additionally under the purview of the studios were the stars themselves—the “star system” developed alongside, and as a result, of the studio system, with film performers as “studio-owned-and-operated commodities.”⁸⁹

Modeled after tactics employed in other facets of entertainment such as vaudeville, film studios would heavily invest—from initial recruiting to vocal training, from grooming to renaming (Archie Leach became Cary Grant, for example)—in individuals that they saw as the greatest future assets. The final stage of this in-house development was the signing of an individual to a performance contract, which bound the actor’s labor to the particular studio for a set number of years.⁹⁰ Contracts could be used as the studio head saw fit, such as MGM head and vice-chairman of the Southern Californian Republican Party, Louis B. Mayer’s decision to require all studio employees to donate a day’s pay to the campaign of Frank Merriam, who was running as the 1934

⁸⁷ Robert A. Brady, “The Problem of Monopoly,” quoted in Tino Balino, *The American Film Industry, Revised Edition*, 253-254.

⁸⁸ Balino, *The American Film Industry, Revised Edition*, 253.

⁸⁹ Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*, 25.

⁹⁰ Like block booking, performance contracts were in use before the officially accepted start of the golden age of the Hollywood Studio system. As a reaction to their use during the silent era of Hollywood film, United Artists was founded in 1919 by Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D.W. Griffith as a means of escaping the performance contract and thus having more control over both their labor and their lives.

Republican candidate for California governor against Upton Sinclair.⁹¹ Anyone who refused to donate found their contracts not renewed when it came time for renewals. Six other studio heads, including Jack Warner at Warner Brothers Studios, followed Mayer's lead in using the contractual obligation employees had to the studios to fund Republican coffers.⁹² Contracts could also, perhaps more expectedly, be used to dictate the type and substance of public appearances—political and otherwise.

Many of the performance contracts issued included what was known as a “morals clause,” which was an effort on behalf of the studios to regulate the behavior of actors, whether they were actively working on set or not.⁹³ Morality clauses included prohibitions against: committing any sort of illegal act, engaging in morally depraved acts, or performing any act that would bring an actor any sort of disrespect, disdain, disrepute, or potential derision with the general public. The morality clause in the performance contract that Clark Gable first signed with MGM in 1931 reads as follows:

The artist agrees to conduct himself with due regard to public conventions and morals and agrees that he will not do or commit any act or thing that will tend to degrade him in society, or bring him into public hatred,

⁹¹ All studio employees earning more than \$100 a week received unsigned checks made out to Mayer in advance with instructions for the suggested ‘donation’ amount and to whom the donation would be going. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 73-74.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ The morals clause in performance contracts was urged on by Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) from 1922-1945. Hays was responsible for the 1930 Motion Picture Production Code (also known as the “Hays Code”), which was designed as a means of industry self-regulation and as a way of stopping the ever-increasing spread of state or municipal film censorship. The three main “General Principles” of the Hays Code are: 1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin; 2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented; 3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. “MPPDA Digital Archive,” <http://mppda.flinders.edu.au/>. The MPPDA changed its name to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in the mid-1940s, shortly after Hays retired, but it wasn't until the 1960s that the authority of the Code began to fade, replaced by the more familiar, modern rating system.

contempt, scorn, or ridicule, or that will tend to shock, insult or offend the community or ridicule public morals or decency or prejudice the producer or the motion picture industry in general.⁹⁴

As is evident from the language of the morality clause section of Gable's contract, the prohibitions laid out in these performance contracts were loosely defined, at best. The lack of clear definition of what precisely was prohibited was in part because studios were intent on minimizing the possibility for a "scandalous contradiction" with and maintaining the continuity between a carefully cultivated on-screen persona and an actor's off-screen persona.⁹⁵ Although there were certain types of behaviors universally disallowed, such as adultery or homosexuality, other behaviors were enforced selectively depending on the "character" of the actor in question—such as being seen frequently out on the town if a male actor were single, or the procurement of a divorce. Performance contracts and morality clauses were a way for studios to protect their investments through a framework of discipline and control, in so doing, regulating both the working and private life of the actor. In regards to political activism specifically, as Steven Ross writes, "Studios were willing to tolerate some partisan activism, but stars who strayed too far from the political mainstream had their careers cut short, blacklisted or graylisted by fearful industry executives," this coupled with the restrictions (and open interpretation) of a performance contract allowed for little political flexibility or maneuvering by celebrities.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "82 Years Ago, Clark Marries His Second Wife...For the Second Time?," <http://dearmrgable.com/?p=6607>.

⁹⁵ Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities*, 59-62.

⁹⁶ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 7.

While the Hollywood studio system faced numerous small lawsuits during its lifespan, the two that led to its demise were the Paramount Famous Lasky Corp, et al. v. United States (1930) and the United States v. Paramount Pictures, et al. (1948).⁹⁷ In 1921, the Federal Trade Commission began investigating charges of block booking, which also brought other monopoly-like practices—such as studio ownership of movie theaters—into focus. According to a *New York Times* article printed September 1, 1921, the formal complaint issued against Famous Players-Lasky and 11 other respondents on August 30 by the FTC detailed, “alleged unlawful schemes to control the entire motion picture business,” which in combination would “drive all independents out of the industry.”⁹⁸ By mid 1927, the FTC had concluded its initial investigation, deeming block booking an unfair and monopolistic practice.⁹⁹ The three respondents (Famous Players-Lasky, Jesse L. Lasky, and Adolph Zukor) were given 60 days in which to comply with the FTC’s findings. Delaying for as long as possible, the respondents required two 60-day extensions before submitting a final report of compliance on April 15, 1928, which was, in turn, rejected by the FTC, who promised measures would be taken against the entire studio system.

⁹⁷ For example, in 1913 a US District Court in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ruled that Adolph Zukor’s Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), which controlled basic patents for film cameras and projectors, was an illegal trust; the US Supreme Court refused to overturn this ruling in 1915. This early anti-trust lawsuit clearly had little effect on the form that the mature studio system: Adolph Zukor had begun the process of merging film production and distribution under Paramount Famous Players Company the very year that the US Supreme Court rejected his appeal regarding the MPPC. See Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History*, 7-26.

⁹⁸ “Attacks Big Firm As Film Monopoly: Federal Trade Board Declares Famous Players-Lasky Corporation Violates Trust Laws,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 1921, 14.

⁹⁹ Other information gathered in the FTC investigation exposed other monopolistic practices beyond block booking; the testimony of Harris Connick and Walter E. Greene spoke of the brokering of an arrangement between the First National Corporation and Famous-Players Lasky that ““would do away with competition between the companies in employing stars, buying stories, and in every way.”” “Paramount Conspiracy: Testimony of Harris Connick & Walter E. Greene,” *New York Telegraph*, April 28, 1923.

Within a week the US Department of Justice filed two antitrust cases against ten members of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA)—Paramount-Famous-Lasky, First National Pictures Inc., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corporation, Universal Film Exchanges Inc., United Artists Corporation, Fox Film Corporation, Pathé Exchange Inc., FBO Pictures Corporation, Vitagraph Inc., and Educational Film Exchanges Inc.¹⁰⁰ While a New York Federal District Court found compulsory arbitration illegal in early 1930, ruling in the government's favor, it was unwilling to provide the necessary legal means to put an end to block booking. Almost immediately thereafter, both parties appealed to the Supreme Court and in November of 1930 the decision issued in *Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., et al. v. United States* found all ten members of the MPPDA guilty of antitrust law violation.¹⁰¹ While the studio system ultimately remained intact until after the ruling of the second Supreme Court case, *Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., et al. v. United States* is important because it officially acknowledged the studio system as a monopoly whose control extended into all facets of the movie industry, including the lives of the celebrities signed to studio contracts.

The second Supreme Court case heard against the studio system, *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, occurred eighteen years after *Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., et al. v. United States*, whose ruling was never fully enforced due in large part to a deal brokered with the Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression under the aegis

¹⁰⁰ The two antitrust cases filed in 1928 focused on charges of the monopolization of domestic booking and the fundamental validity of compulsory arbitration for conspiracy in violation of antitrust law and were combined into a single equity suit in 1930.

¹⁰¹ *Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., et al. v. United States*, 282 US, 30 (1930).

of the National Industrial Recovery Act.¹⁰² As with the previous Supreme Court case, the 1948 case began much earlier, with a 1938 lawsuit leveled against eight studios by the government.¹⁰³ Charged with violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, the lawsuit stipulated that the studios needed to (once again) end block booking and divest themselves of either their theaters or their distribution branches.¹⁰⁴

The initial trial, which occurred in June of 1940 at the Federal Court level in New York, ended after two weeks when the government and the attorneys representing the studios reached a settlement: the agreed-upon consent decree stated that the studios would be able to keep possession of their theaters but were now required to limit block booking.¹⁰⁵ The settlement between the government and the studios displeased many of the prominent independent producers of the time, including Walt Disney, Samuel Goldwyn, and Orson Welles, and as a result, the studios and the government ended up back in court in the fall of 1945, this time resulting in a guilty ruling in June of 1946.¹⁰⁶ Once again, both sides filed appeals that brought the case before the Supreme Court in

¹⁰² Under the shelter of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), in 1933 the MPPDA and Roosevelt administration made a deal in which the anti-trust case would essentially be null and void in exchange for the studios being more open to labor unionization—one of the stipulations of the NIRA. The Hollywood studio-Roosevelt administration deal thus reinforced/served to strengthen the vertical integration (and resulting profits) that Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., et al. v. United States had been attempting to regulate while simultaneously laying the foundation for a fundamental shift in industry organization. See Michael Haupt, *The Entertainment Industry*, 209-217; Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History*.

¹⁰³ The seven studios were: Columbia, MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, Universal, and Warner Brothers.

¹⁰⁴ The opinion of the court in Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation v. United States specifically spoke to the ways in which the proceeding would “seek to prevent further violation” of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act by the motion picture industry—further redress was clearly necessary after the NIRA agreement.

¹⁰⁵ Studios were limited to no more than five films in a block. William F. Whitman, “The Consent Decree in the Moving Picture Industry,” *Fordham Law Review* 10:1 (1941).

¹⁰⁶ The dissatisfaction with the consent decree between the government and the film studios resulted, in part, in formation of the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers (SIMMP), who included Charlie Chaplin, Samuel Goldwyn, Mary Pickford, David O. Selznick, and Orson Welles. For more on SIMMP see the SIMMP Research Database, http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/index.htm.

February of 1948, which issued a ruling in May of that same year declaring the studios guilty of antitrust violations and validating earlier verdicts. This final Supreme Court ruling marked the beginning of the decline of the Hollywood studio system, which all but disintegrated by the start of the 1960s and, this in turn, resulted in the beginning of a divestment in studio control of celebrity.¹⁰⁷

The Times, They Are A-Changin': Political Assertiveness & Celebrity Empowerment

As celebrities gradually recovered from the scare of the blacklist years and moved away from the control of the studios, from the 1960s on there was a shift in celebrity politics from that of generally passive, middle-of-the-road, or studio-sanctioned politics to a politics played out in public which openly sided took sides; individual actors and musicians realized that they could use their celebrity as a visible form of political agency. Film and music stars drew upon their social and cultural capital, consciously employing fame to call public attention to the various political causes of the 1960s and 70s, including, but not limited to: the student movement, environmental activism, and the women's rights movement. However, the two political causes that attracted the greatest degree of celebrity involvement during this time period were the civil rights and anti-war movements. All of these movements participated in the broadening of the political discussed in the introduction, which made things that had previously not been political decidedly so. As a result of this broadening of the political and the shift in celebrity politics, individual celebrities began to develop public identities as *political* celebrities.

¹⁰⁷ One begins to see an unprecedented level of re-integration with not just Hollywood studios but all types of media in the last 20 years, where 90% of all media content is owned by the top six US corporations: GE, Newscorp, Disney, Viacom, Time-Warner, and CBS. See Robert McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century*.

The first political movement that celebrities openly involved themselves with after the blacklist years was the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, which organized a Hollywood-based chapter in 1959.¹⁰⁸ Although the second meeting of SANE attracted 150 influential Hollywood directors, writers, and actors, the Hollywood chapter of the organization disbanded within two years of forming. Ronald Brownstein attributes Hollywood SANE's short existence to the tension that existed between the call to activism on behalf of celebrity and the "barriers that still restrained it," such as the lingering charges of subversion left over from the blacklisting years.¹⁰⁹ However, the escalating US civil rights movement would provide the impetus necessary to draw celebrities publicly into politics, removing any remaining restraints.

Celebrities found in the civil rights movement a cause worthy of their widespread support and many were active in the movement from the early 1960s on.¹¹⁰ Positioning the civil rights movement as a point of unity for celebrities, *The Christian Science Monitor* suggested that "only once before has Hollywood become so deeply committed to an event outside its insular world...during World War II, when virtually all of show

¹⁰⁸ At roughly around this same time the State Department was funding overseas tours of American jazz artists such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Dave Brubeck. According to Mark Wheeler, "For the USA, the artistic individuality of jazz musicians was a useful device with which to counter the collectivism of the Soviet Union." *Celebrity Politics*, 144. These musical junket tours were the precursor to the increased utilization of the celebrity Goodwill Ambassador by such organizations as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nation's Children's Fund, particularly in the post 9/11 era.

¹⁰⁹ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 145-146.

¹¹⁰ Some, like Harry Belafonte, had been active since nearly the movement's beginning. Belafonte, who was blacklisted in the 1950s, had been participating in marches with Martin Luther King, Jr. from the time of their first meeting in 1956. See Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 185-226.

business roused itself in the face of German military might.”¹¹¹ One of the obvious ways that celebrities supported the civil rights movement was through monetary contribution and every major civil rights organization in the 1960s received this type of celebrity support.¹¹² Marlon Brando, for example, pledged twelve percent of what he made to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), led by Martin Luther King, Jr.¹¹³ However, celebrities were also used as an ‘incentive’ to encourage others to give their money to these organizations. As a means of fundraising, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began throwing parties at the homes of individual hosts in which celebrity actors would attend, to mingle with and entertain the party guests—raising tens of thousands of dollars in the process. For example, at a party in Westport, Connecticut on August 23, 1964, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Leo Nevas, guests paid \$10, 966.95 in pledges to attend a party with celebrity guests Harry Belafonte and Ossie Davis.¹¹⁴

Contrary to what had occurred in earlier periods, participation in the civil rights movement by celebrities was neither mandated by the studios or at the request of the government nor did it occur merely as more passive forms of participation (such as monetary donations or party attending); marches, voter drives, and the like attracted both traditionally Democratic and Republican celebrities. A 1963 article in the *Baltimore Sun* covering the (now famous) civil rights March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

¹¹¹ John C. Waugh, “Social Issues Stir Film Colony,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 15, 1963, 4. Waugh goes on to write that “Hollywood otherwise has built a large reputation for noninvolvement in almost everything of national moment.”

¹¹² *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 205.

¹¹³ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 56.

¹¹⁴ “‘Report On Special Gifts Fundraising,’ August, 1965, New York Friends of SNCC,” in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 207.

(where Martin Luther King, Jr., made his “I Have a Dream” speech) talks about how the marchers “applauded celebrities from Hollywood” in the same sentence as it does them greeting “senators and House members with chants of ‘Pass the Bill, Pass the Bill.’”¹¹⁵

The Christian Science Monitor covering the same march makes note of the (perceived as) unconventional celebrity political activism, stating:

When more than 100,000 march on Washington this month in the name of civil rights, at least 60 of them will be famous faces from Hollywood... This will mark a stunning performance for Hollywood, which has traditionally kept its nose from being thrust into so controversial a national concern.¹¹⁶

The article goes on to list such well-known celebrity figures, who would be marching “side by side with their lesser-known fellow countrymen,” such as Charlton Heston, Judy Garland, Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Kirk Douglas, Harry Belafonte, Gene Kelly, and Gregory Peck, making note of the way in which the celebrity body, via political activism, would be occupying the same space as the everyday body.¹¹⁷ A *New York Times* article puts the significance of celebrity participation in the March on Washington in different terms than that of *The Christian Science Monitor*, noting that they are “rejoining the nation after nearly 16 years of spiritual secession” and that “if important actors, writers and directors decide that the controversial issues of the day are important to them as human beings, then it may not be too long before they conclude that these same subjects are of concern to them as artists.”¹¹⁸ Unlike the article in *The Christian Science Monitor*, which highlights the distinction of the celebrity, the *New York*

¹¹⁵ Phillip Potter, “D.C. March,” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 29, 1963, 1.

¹¹⁶ Waugh, “Social Issues Stir Film Colony.”

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Belafonte had helped to organize the celebrity delegation to Washington.

¹¹⁸ Murray Schumach, “Hollywood Cause: Movie Delegation Set to Join Racial March No Fanfare Citizen’s Right Shadow From the Past,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1963.

Times article attempts to talk about the everyday quality of the celebrity activists, particularly the ways in which they are private citizens participating in public politics.

Quoting Charlton Heston, executive of the Screen Actors Guild, on the issue:

...public personalities have private rights. They cannot abdicate their public personality... We approach this issue of civil rights as private citizens... We are aware of our rights as private citizens. What is even more important, perhaps, is that we are aware of our responsibilities as private citizens... But we feel very strongly that we must make clear our support for the civil rights bill.¹¹⁹

Although celebrity participants in the March on Washington (and outside of the realm of fundraising generally) did not typically call attention to their celebrity—not only did they stress being ‘private’ citizens, but, no special ‘Hollywood’ or ‘celebrity’ civil rights contingent was organized (unlike, HANL, for example)—their celebrity was impossible to ignore. The headline of *Variety* the day after the March read: “March Tramples on D.C. Boxoffice; Showfolk Figure in Demonstration;” King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” was not mentioned in the article.¹²⁰ And, regardless of their reasons for participation—which were debated in many news articles of the time period—the social and cultural capital of the celebrities involved in the March on Washington are attributed to the March’s success.¹²¹ These binary valences used to articulate the essence of who a celebrity *is*—the individual celebrity as unique or special versus the individual celebrity as ordinary or ‘just like us’—are also deployed to help determine what a celebrity’s role in political activism should be or is—the celebrity as uniquely able to bring attention to a

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ted Johnson, “When Brando Marched With Heston: How Variety Covered the March on Washington,” *Variety*, August 27, 2013, <http://variety.com/2013/voices/columns/when-marlon-brando-marched-with-charlton-heston-how-variety-covered-the-march-on-washington-1200589376/>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

cause or the celebrity as exercising their rights as citizen subjects. While these valences regularly appear separate from one another, they also are collapsed in the concept of the celebrity as “model”—in their participation in politics celebrities are exercising their rights as citizen subjects and, in so doing, bring attention to the cause, showing other citizen subjects that such political engagement is possible. This classification of what it means to be a celebrity and, moreover, what it means to be a *political* celebrity continues to play out in public discourse in the present moment—as will be seen in subsequent chapters.

Celebrities also called upon their social and cultural capital in an organizational capacity, going into southern cities and attempting to improve race relations between blacks and whites. For example, Gadsen, Alabama was the site of multiple visits by Hollywood celebrities, in an effort to forge lines of communication between black workers and white factory owners and to arrange a conference between city officials and residents. Actors Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, and Anthony Franciosa were threatened with imprisonment for their efforts and Gadsen’s mayor accused them of “rabble-rousing” tactics. However, the four actors saw themselves as “ambassadors of goodwill and not as agitators,” and, according to Brando there was great potential for Hollywood celebrities to serve in the South in the way that “entertainers have responded willingly to appeals from the State Department to serve as ambassadors of goodwill abroad.”¹²²

Film and television stars were not the only celebrities to capitalize on their fame for the cause; musicians—particularly folk musicians—were also active in the civil rights

¹²² “Brando, 3 Actors Defend Roles In Rights Protest,” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 24, 1963, 5. See also: “Brando and Pals Called Rabble Rousers,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 1963, 6.

movement, using that which they had most readily at their disposal (music) as a form of political protest and engagement. Joan Baez, for example, heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak while in high school and, after touring the Jim Crow South in the early part of the decade, would only perform for integrated audiences thereafter.¹²³ Many of the songs that Bob Dylan wrote in the early part of the 1960s drew attention to the cause; the lyrics of Dylan's "Oxford Town" (1962) were about racial segregation and the right of James Meredith to attend an all-white university, whereas "Only a Pawn in Their Game" (1963) told the story of the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers by white supremacists.¹²⁴ However, his first political song, according to Peter Drier, was "The Ballad of Emmett Till," which was about the murder of fourteen year old Till who was shot to death in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a white woman; Dylan wrote "The Ballad of Emmett Till" as he was hoping to be asked to perform at an upcoming benefit for the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). Dylan would go on to perform at voter-registration rallies sponsored by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as well as at the 1963 March on Washington, where Baez also performed.¹²⁵

Amid tumult at home during this time period, America became actively engaged in a war abroad. Like the civil rights movement, America's involvement in Vietnam also

¹²³ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 54.

¹²⁴ It has been suggested that Dylan was politicized by girlfriend Suze Rotolo, secretary for the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE); none of the songs on Dylan's first album, which he released before meeting Rotolo, were particularly political or even topical. See Peter Drier, "The Political Bob Dylan," *The Huffington Post*, May 24, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/the-political-bob-dylan_b_866494.html.

¹²⁵ It should be noted that *The Christian Science Monitor* article that lauds the extraordinariness of Hollywood celebrity involvement in the upcoming March on Washington never once mentions the participation of musicians, suggesting that, at least at that historical juncture there was a point of differentiation between the film star and the musical star.

drew celebrity attention. Whereas previous military engagements, such as the first and second World Wars, had generally been publicly supported by celebrities, what made celebrity political activism surrounding Vietnam distinct and worth noting is that it was the first public critique of the state's foreign policy by celebrities. While American involvement in Vietnam did have some celebrity support (most notably from John Wayne), most celebrities were against the war. The first celebrity to openly criticize the US's involvement in Vietnam was Robert Vaughn, best known for his role as Napoleon Solo in the television show *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*¹²⁶ Examples of Vaughn's early anti-Vietnam activism are an anti-war speech at a January 1966 Democratic rally in Indianapolis and his televised debate of arch-conservative William F. Buckley on *Firing Line* in 1967. Vaughn went on to chair the Dissenting Democrats against Lyndon B. Johnson and, according to Mark Wheeler, "his skepticism led to other Hollywood stars openly questioning the government."¹²⁷ Like Vaughn, Paul Newman also rallied around the anti-war Democratic candidate running against LBJ, Eugene McCarthy. Newman engaged in a range of activities to support McCarthy, including serving as the master of ceremonies at a telethon to raise money for McCarthy, appearing in campaign commercials, and backing the candidate heavily in the New Hampshire primary.¹²⁸ McCarthy, who failed to win the Democratic nomination, also received the support of

¹²⁶ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 56.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ At the New Hampshire Democratic primary McCarthy ended up with 42% of the vote to LBJ's 49%. See Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 47. Not long after the close primary returns the Tet offensive occurred (turning the tide of general public opinion in regards to Vietnam), LBJ withdrew from the Presidential race, and Robert Kennedy entered as a new Democratic candidate. Before his assassination, Kennedy had the support of celebrities such as Warren Beatty and sister Shirley MacLaine; Beatty had his political 'start' in the Kennedy campaign. In 1972, Warren Beatty put acting on hold to work as a campaign manager for Democratic candidate George McGovern,

celebrities such as Alan Arkin, Burt Lancaster, Leonard Nimoy, and Barbara Streisand.¹²⁹ Although other celebrities were involved in various other forms of anti-war protest, perhaps the best-known (and most controversial) celebrity political activist was Jane Fonda. Fonda is worth looking at in a bit of detail because, as Steven Ross notes, “Fonda’s opposition to the Vietnam War and participation in many left-oriented struggles helped usher in the current era of celebrity politics.”¹³⁰

Active in various political causes in the 1960s, Jane Fonda became associated with the anti-war movement in 1970; left activists welcomed Fonda’s involvement because while at this point it is true that an anti-war position was not uncommon or radical, per se, her celebrity was seen as a potential counter-response to such pro-war celebrity supporters as John Wayne, Bob Hope, and Charlton Heston.¹³¹ In 1971 Fonda and Donald Sutherland co-organized and performed alongside other celebrity actors, musicians, comedians, and authors in a series of shows entitled ‘Free the Army’ (or, alternatively, ‘Fuck the Army’).¹³² The FTA shows were meant to mimic the format, but not the politics, of Bob Hope’s USO shows and were performed at military base-adjacent venues in the US, the Philippines, and Japan in an effort to bring soldiers the type of shows “they really wanted to see.”¹³³ Fonda associated herself with the

¹²⁹ Although celebrities have had a history of political campaigning, support was typically given to the incumbent candidate or the party front-runner.

¹³⁰ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 228.

¹³¹ Ibid., 234; and Mary Hersherberger, *Jane Fonda’s War: A Political Biography of an Anti-War Icon*. Fonda’s name resonated across a wide swath of Americans not just because of her own work as an actress but also because of the fame of her father and older brother.

¹³² Ibid., 237-238; Schroeder, *Celebrity-In-Chief*, 105-106; and Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 57. Not surprisingly, the FTA tour was denied permission to perform on military installations in the US and in Southeast Asia by both the Pentagon and the State Department.

¹³³ Ross estimates that the Fonda and Sutherland designed show reached roughly 64,000 troops in a nine-month period. Ibid.; and Rabidoux, *Hollywood Politics*, 133-134.

organization Vietnam Veterans Against the War, a group she ended up being influential in as she was successful at “politicizing the previously apolitical,” helped to found the Entertainment Industry for Peace and Justice—which put the end of the war in Vietnam at the top of the causes it was fundraising to support—and began the Indochina Peace Campaign (ICP) in June of 1972 with soon-to-be husband, political activist Tom Hayden.¹³⁴ It was, however, Fonda’s trip to North Vietnam in July of 1972 that garnered the most attention.

Fonda received an invitation to visit Hanoi from North Vietnamese officials and was urged to do so by Hayden, who “argued that her celebrity would draw attention to the cause.”¹³⁵ It is easy to take for granted the significance of Hayden’s argument in favor of sending Fonda to North Vietnam as we have become accustomed not only to celebrities being used to draw attention to a cause not sanctioned by the state but also to images of celebrities visiting foreign lands ravaged by war. However, at the time a visit like Fonda’s was less commonplace and therefore to witness via the media such a popular celebrity publicly opposing the state in such a way was striking for average citizen-subjects. Fonda wouldn’t be the first non-military US civilian to visit North Vietnam, since the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was passed in 1964 over 200 Americans had traveled to the country. These earlier trips to North Vietnam had typically been as peace or fact-finding missions and Fonda’s plan was to deliver 200 letters to American POWs and to photograph the damage done to the dike system as a result of Nixon’s (denied) carpet-bombing campaign. After completing these aspects of her visit, and touring the country

¹³⁴ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 235; Rabidoux, 134.

¹³⁵ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 239.

for two weeks, Fonda agreed to record ten radio addresses for Radio Hanoi aimed at American soldiers, particularly bomber pilots. In one such of these broadcasts Fonda extolled:

I beg you to consider what you are doing...there are no military targets...These are peasants...They are similar to the farmers in the Midwest many years ago in the U.S. Perhaps your grandmothers and grandfathers would not be so different from these peasants...what kind of people can Americans be, those who would drop all kinds of bombs, so carelessly on their innocent heads, destroying their villages and endangering the lives of millions of people?¹³⁶

In another broadcast she spoke of meeting American pilot POWs whom she said believed that they were bombing military targets; because of the danger of bombing civilians, Fonda was tasked with passing on the POWs' message to their friends and loved ones back home "to be as actively involved in the peace movement as possible, to renew their efforts to end the war."¹³⁷ On the last day of Fonda's visit, she traveled to an anti-aircraft military installation, where because of her celebrity she was asked by photographers to pose for pictures—including, most famously, smiling broadly and wearing a hard hat on top of an anti-aircraft artillery battery. Although Fonda asked the photographers not to print the pictures, to which they agreed they would not, within 24 hours they found their way into publication, much to the outrage of many people back in the United States. As Ross points out, "The photo, which along with the radio broadcasts earned her the sobriquet 'Hanoi Jane,' would haunt her forever."¹³⁸

¹³⁶ "Dikes in the Red River Delta (July 14 1972, broadcast)," in *Jane Fonda's Words of Politics and Passion*, ed. Mary Hersberger, 24.

¹³⁷ "POWs Call For Peace (July 20, 1972, broadcast)," in *Jane Fonda's Words of Politics and Passion*, ed. Mary Hersberger, 28.

¹³⁸ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 241. Fonda has yet to live down neither the "Hanoi Jane" nickname nor her actions during her trip to Vietnam; both are regularly carted out by conservatives and veterans

Upon returning home Fonda was met with a mixed response.¹³⁹ While Fonda's trip resonated positively with some members of the anti-war movement, others felt that she had gone too far by traveling to North Vietnam. Conservative critics not only denounced her for going, but also tried to use Fonda's activism as a way to warn off other celebrity activists. More importantly, Fonda's visit to Hanoi also received particular attention from the US government, with an overarching emphasis on the desire to hold her accountable for her conduct; this is significant because her actions were not just marked as distinctly political among average citizen-subjects but were considered to also be so by the government. Fonda made the Nixon White House's infamous "enemies" list, and there was talk of having the Attorney General charge her with treason. Fonda also caught the attention of Congress, specifically the House Committee on Internal Security (which had replaced HUAC).¹⁴⁰ Investigating Fonda's broadcasts and activities while in North Vietnam, the committee convened for hearings in September of 1972, during which time Fonda's trip was used for various political maneuverings, including

groups. For example, attempts were made to link Fonda and Kerry during the 2004 presidential election, including "Kerry/Fonda" bumper stickers and photoshopped images that placed the two at anti-war rallies together. Or, more recently, there was outrage over Fonda being cast as Nancy Reagan in Lee Daniels' film, *The Butler*. Veterans groups boycotted the film, creating Facebook group pages (such as <https://www.facebook.com/TheButlerBoycot>). See Connor Adams Sheets, "Veterans Boycotting 'The Butler' Over Jane Fonda's Portrayal Of Nancy Reagan," *International Business Times*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/veterans-boycotting-butler-over-jane-fondas-portrayal-nancy-reagan-1391169>. There is also a cafepress store where you can buy your very own Hanoi Jane-hating items: <http://www.cafepress.com/+hanoi-jane+gifts>.

¹³⁹ As Ross points out, "the enormous publicity generated by her visit allowed Fonda to accomplish her goal: the United States stopped bombing the dikes in August." *Hollywood Left and Right*, 241.

¹⁴⁰ Carl C. Craft, "House Internal Security Group Probes Anti-War Broadcasts by Jane Fonda," *Nashua Telegraph*, August 26, 1972, 15; "House Group Rejects Attempt to Subpoena Actress Fonda," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, August 11, 1972, 3.

“an analysis of the federal criminal law vis-à-vis the recent conduct of Jane Fonda...”¹⁴¹

In particular, in the event that Fonda was not found guilty of treason and sedition by Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, Missouri Democrat Richard Ichord, Chairman of the committee, wanted two pieces of legislation passed—both of which ultimately failed. The first was a bill that would restrict travel to countries engaged in armed conflict with the US; in an address to the House regarding the necessity for such a bill, Representative Ichord spoke of Fonda as a:

...tool of the Hanoi propagandists...Her statements are of a most pernicious nature...If we can generally agree that the activities of U.S. citizens in North Vietnam have been overwhelmingly adverse to our national interests, then the solution is to simplify the evidentiary requirements by making unlawful all travel to countries with which we are engaged in armed conflict...¹⁴²

The second was an amendment to Section 4 of the Internal Security Act of 1950, which would allow the President to “restrict travel by citizens and nationals of the United States to, in, or through any country or area whose military forces are engaged in armed conflict with the military forces of the United States,” making it apiece with the previous bill, which also contained language regarding the President and travel.¹⁴³ Ultimately, Fonda was not charged with treason—this was even after back-and-forth correspondence between Kleindienst and Ichord as well as impassioned testimony at the hearings, in which the entire history of the definition of treason was detailed and Fonda was equated

¹⁴¹ “Transcript of Jane Fonda’s Radio Hanoi Broadcast, U.S. Congress House Committee On Internal Security, Travel to Hostile Areas, September, 1972 [Excerpt],” in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 174.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 176.

with Tokyo Rose.¹⁴⁴ The federal government pursued no further prosecution measures, while bills attempting to ban Fonda and her films introduced in several states, including Maryland, California, and Indiana, failed to pass—again speaking to the implicit understanding of the potential power of celebrities not just to be individual political agents, but to serve as political models through their agency. The Paris Peace Accords would be signed in January of 1973 and in March of that same year the last remaining US troops would leave Vietnam; although Fonda remains politically active to this day, she continues to be defined primarily by her actions in 1972. The backlash against Fonda (both in the moment and afterwards) also speaks to the range of political possibilities open to celebrities; while actors and actresses were no longer constrained by the dictates of the studio system, the lives of all variety of celebrity were still subject to public opinion and perception, which when negative could potentially have a direct impact on their ability to earn a living in the entertainment industries and on their status as a celebrity. Therefore, while film and television studios and music labels might no longer directly control the political activities of celebrities, nor do they typically support or denounce their politics per se, it is impossible to make the claim that they have no role in celebrity politics. And while Fonda had enough cachet to weather the Hanoi Jane scandal with her celebrity mostly intact, she would serve as a cautionary tale for other celebrities who would either find their politics tempered by the public or would choose a form of self-governance to avoid any backlash.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ U.S. House, Committee on Internal Security, Hearings Regarding H.R. 16742: Restraints on Travel to Hostile Areas.

¹⁴⁵ This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, specifically in the figure of Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks.

By the mid to late 1970s, “as emotions cooled nationally,” the celebrity world found itself, at least until the 1980s, politically quieted and “the pendulum in the industry swung back toward greater political discretion.”¹⁴⁶ However, the 1960s and 70s were not just about (more) left-leaning politics; the grassroots, conservative movement also came into being during this time period and while it didn’t attract the same number of celebrities as the left, celebrities were also engaged in right-wing, conservative politics. Political dissensus among celebrities is a further illustration of the untethering of celebrities from the rules and regulations of the studios and the shift to celebrities embracing their own agency as both celebrities and political actors. Evidence of this political dissensus can be found in one of the most well known political celebrities/celebrity politicians to date: Ronald Reagan.¹⁴⁷

From early on in his political career, Reagan attempted to use the cultural capital he built up as a celebrity as an access point into politics while simultaneously working to develop a distinct persona as private citizen. In language very similar to that used by Charlton Heston, who would become one of the strongest supporters in his campaign for President, Reagan believed that “actors were ‘citizens and should exert those rights by speaking their minds.’”¹⁴⁸ Reagan’s public ‘exertions’ of citizenship were full of anti-communist rhetoric that he had developed as a “friendly witness” during the blacklist years and which the young conservative movement was particularly receptive to; Reagan

¹⁴⁶ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 264.

¹⁴⁷ While the celebrity world has developed a reputation of being a hotbed of left-leaning politics, it is in fact conservative celebrities who have had the greatest success across the board with refashioning their celebrity into political careers—with Reagan, John Wayne, and Arnold Schwarzenegger being the most notable.

¹⁴⁸ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 160.

was invited, for example, along with fellow conservative celebrities Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Pat Boone, and John Wayne to participate in a weeklong “Anti-Communism School” held by The Christian Anti-Communism Crusade in Orange County, California.¹⁴⁹ In late 1965, Reagan announced his run for Governor of California, bolstered by the “Time for Choosing” speech he delivered for Barry Goldwater’s (failed) bid for President. According to the *New York Times*, the televised speech, which spoke of government ineptitude, the need for morally right foreign policy, and foreshadowed the ‘Evil Empire’ rhetoric of later speeches, was “the most successful national political debut since William Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 Democratic convention with the ‘Cross of Gold’ speech.”¹⁵⁰ Campaigning as an ‘ex-Democrat,’ which served to distinguish him from what increasingly was understood as a left-leaning Hollywood, Reagan espoused a “politics of resentment that appealed to...working-and middle-class white ethnics,” speaking out against many of the very social movements that other celebrities had come to support, including the student, civil rights, and anti-war movements.¹⁵¹

Capitalizing on skills obtained from his career as an actor in his debates with opponent Pat Brown—in which image and delivery are as important (if not more so) than content—Reagan captured 57.7% of the votes in the November 1966 gubernatorial election and easily won re-election in 1970; his inner-circle began planning the possibility of a presidential run within a year of Reagan first taking the Governor’s

¹⁴⁹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, 63-63; Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 162-163.

¹⁵⁰ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 172.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 176. Donald Trump, a Republican candidate in the 2016 presidential race, is also running as a former Democrat.

office.¹⁵² Reagan first ran against, and lost to, Gerald Ford in the 1976 presidential primaries, before being elected President of the United States in 1980; the conservative political ideologies that were just in nascent form in the early 1960s were coming into maturity in the White House with Reagan's election. And Reagan, while popular with an American public whose members were "increasingly less likely to think of him as an actor at all," found himself unpopular among many members of the group who were once his peers; according to Ronald Brownstein, "from the moment of his first political success in Sacramento, the Hollywood left took Reagan's rise as a personal insult."¹⁵³ Yet Reagan's Presidency would help to shape the celebrity politics of the 1980s—while opposition to the policies of the Reagan administration served as a rallying point for many politically active celebrities of the time, Reagan himself served to legitimize celebrity political participation. Having a celebrity elected to the highest political office in the country suggested that celebrity politics were not just spectacle and opened up the possibility that celebrities could be seemingly savvy political actors, understood as experts in foreign and domestic issues in their own right.

Celebrities remained politically active in the early to mid-1980s before entering a period of relative quietism in the late 80s and 1990s—at least quiet in comparison to the activism of the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁵⁴ Political activism in the 80s and 90s followed

¹⁵² According to Ross, Reagan "left an indelible impact on electoral politics by paving the way for the modern-day 24/7 media-infused world," which other celebrity politicians would use "to great effect." *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁵³ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 278. Brownstein suggests that actors were dismayed with both Reagan's politics and with the fact that if the public was going to elect an actor president, the least they could have done was to pick a "good one."

¹⁵⁴ The reasons behind the de-escalation of celebrity politics as the 80s progressed into the 90s—particularly once Reagan left the White House—are unclear.

many of the patterns that had been established in the previous two decades, with activity coalescing around major events and national concerns—such as the participation of celebrities such as Martin Sheen and Lou Diamond Phillips in the ‘relay fasts’ organized by Cesar Chavez to protest the use of pesticides on grapes.¹⁵⁵ Many of the politically active celebrities of the period were those who had also participated in politics in the 1960s and 70s and, with few exceptions, those who were publicly involved maintained a left-leaning politics.¹⁵⁶ Younger celebrities were also ‘recruited’ into the world of politics by an older generation of politically minded celebrities; this new generation of celebrities in turn adopted a political orientation similar to that of the older generation of celebrities. This is not to say that celebrities fell into ideological synchronism with one another during this period—like always celebrities represented the entire political continuum—rather that generally the celebrities receiving the most attention for their politics in the 1980s and 1990s tended to lean left.

Reflective of Ronald Reagan’s escalation of the Cold War and the associated threat of nuclear warfare, politically active celebrities once again began to participate in the nuclear disarmament movement that they had been drawn to in the immediate post-war years. The June 12, 1982 March and Rally in Central Park for Nuclear Disarmament, which drew roughly one million participants and was the “apogee of a citizen action campaign known as the ‘Nuclear Freeze,’” attracted celebrity marchers and performers,

¹⁵⁵ Albert R. Karr, “Tag-Team Fasting Is the Latest Twist in Public Protests,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 1988, A1.

¹⁵⁶ Charlton Heston is one of the exceptions and he begins to figure prominently in 1980s conservative politics, whereas he leaned more centrist (or at the very least, traditionally libertarian) prior to then.

including Jackson Browne, Bruce Springsteen, Joan Baez, and Linda Ronstadt.¹⁵⁷ In that same year, California Proposition 12—the Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze Initiative—was set to be on the November ballot. If passed, Proposition 12 would require that:

[T]he Governor of California to write a specified communication to the President of the United States and other identified United States officials urging that the United States Government propose to the Soviet Union that both countries agree to immediately halt the testing, production and further deployment of all nuclear weapons, missiles and delivery systems in a way that can be checked and verified by both sides.¹⁵⁸

One of the celebrities campaigning in favor of Proposition 12 was Paul Newman, who believed that a nuclear freeze was necessary to end ““this nuclear game of leapfrog.””¹⁵⁹ Charlton Heston, on the other hand, who only five years prior had campaigned for Proposition 5, the California Clean Indoor Air Act, was opposed to the nuclear freeze initiative—making television spots voicing his opposition and appearing on Pat Robertson’s *700 Club* to discuss the ways in which the initiative would make the world a more dangerous place.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Tad Daley, “Thirty Years Ago Today, at the Nuclear Freeze Rally in Central Park, We Saved Ourselves From Ourselves,” *The Huffington Post*, June 12, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tad-daley/nuclear-war-protest_b_1588344.html. According to Jonathan Schell, the rally “was not only the largest antinuclear demonstration but the largest political demonstration of any description in American history. Nothing like it has happened again, either.” Schell, “The Spirit of June 12,” *The Nation*, July 2, 2007, <http://www.thenation.com/article/spirit-june-12#>. See also: Bryan Farrell, “Remembering the 1982 rally against nuclear arms,” *Waging Nonviolence*, June 12, 2009, <http://wagingnonviolence.org/2009/06/remembering-the-1982-rally-against-nuclear-arms/>; Lawrence S. Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact,” *Arms Control Today*, December 2010, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_12/LookingBack; and “Concerts in Parks,” <http://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/concerts>.

¹⁵⁸ Proposition 12 Ballot Summary, http://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_12_Bilateral_Nuclear_Weapons_Freeze_Initiative_%281982%29. For the full proposed initiative see the 1982 Voter Guide: http://librarysource.uchastings.edu/ballot_pdf/1982g.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ “Stars debate nuclear freeze,” *Lewiston Journal*, October 30, 1982, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 299. Heston’s position on nuclear disarmament was shaped by the Reagan administration—he met with State Department officials in the month leading up to the election in

In one of the more bizarre moments of celebrity politics of the 1980s, the two would come to debate one another on the topic on the ABC talk show *The Last Word* just days before the election—standing in not just as celebrities but as experts on the issue of the nuclear freeze initiative. The debate was nicknamed “Star Wars,” the same nickname bestowed upon Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative one year later, and, according to the *Ocala Star-Banner*, it was “Butch Cassidy meets Ben Hur, two movie favorites confronting each other on one screen.”¹⁶¹ Greg Jackson, the show’s host, fielded phone calls and moderated, attempting to reinforce that the debate was not about Heston or Newman as nuclear weapons experts or “trying to get proof. It’s your two positions.” However, this attempt was clearly contradicted by the fact that the two actors were engaged in a format that is most often associated with legitimate politics and expertise on an issue.¹⁶² This disconnection between the claims of the host that this was just a debate between regular men (i.e., individuals removed from the political establishment) attempting to voice their opinions was compounded by the actions of the two actors during the debate. Throughout the run of the debate Newman and Heston leveraged statistics, history, and other (sometimes incorrect) facts that they suggested they were privy to due to relationships with members of the military and defense communities, the result of which being that the two came off very much like any other pair of political

order to make sure that he understood the government’s position. See: Ibid; and “Newman, Heston Debate Nuke Freeze,” *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, October 31, 1982, 9A.

¹⁶¹ “Newman, Heston Debate Nuke Freeze.” See also: “Newman, Heston Agree to TV Debate,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, October 30, 1982, 10A.

¹⁶² “Transcript from Nuclear Freeze Debate Between Charlton Heston and Paul Newman on ABC’s *The Last Word*, October 30, 1982,” in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 85.

pundits debating the nuclear freeze issue. And Jackson partially belied his own aims by beginning the debate with the following statement:

Now both Mr. Newman and Mr. Heston acknowledge they are not military scientists. But experts we've checked with say that they are obviously intelligent and responsible in their arguments...Serious men committed and truly talented at communicating so that we can understand both sides of the nuclear freeze question.¹⁶³

Not just the content of the debate but the fact that the debate was happening at all—broadcast on a major network television station and being taken seriously by the people calling in—reflected the beginnings of the subtle change in celebrity political agency brought about by the election of Reagan and perpetuated by the media: the acknowledgement that celebrities could have a causal effect on political causes as individuals capable of intelligence and expertise on a matter and not *just* as celebrities. This is different than Jane Fonda's anti-war appearances, for example, which were seemingly always framed first and foremost around her celebrity.¹⁶⁴

While Newman rated his performance in the debate as only so-so, California voters passed Proposition 12. However, Heston also had an impact on voters, as “the pro-freeze force's 25-point lead in the polls rapidly shrunk” after Heston “clashed with Newman on ABC.”¹⁶⁵ The proposition only passed by a margin of 52 to 48 percent. Charlton Heston was such a powerfully effective proponent of Reagan administration nuclear policies, as well as being one of the few vocal conservative celebrity allies at the time, that he was granted Q level clearance, the highest-level nuclear weapons clearance

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ For examples, when Fonda would give an anti-war talk, the advertisements might encourage you to come hear “Barbarella” speak.

¹⁶⁵ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 300.

available in the country. From early 1983 through 1989 Heston would narrate training films, such as one completed in 1989 entitled “Trust but Verify,” for the Department of Energy that were to be shown to other individuals with high-level clearance.¹⁶⁶ Heston was also called upon to show his support for Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative by providing the voice-over narration for a television spot in which he referred to the missile defense system as a type of “peace shield.”¹⁶⁷

However, Heston’s support of nuclear proliferation put him in a minority as most celebrities who voiced an opinion on the nuclear issue in the 1980s came down on the side of disarmament. Barbara Streisand, who had not been involved in politics since the early 1970s, was reengaged as a result of the Chernobyl disaster, becoming involved in the Hollywood Women’s Political Committee (HWPC) due to a growing anxiety over the arms race.¹⁶⁸ Celebrities such as Judd Nelson, Sally Field, Richard Dreyfus, and Carl Reiner teamed up with the organization People Reaching Out for Peace (PRO-Peace) to plan, publicize, and participate in a march in 1986 from Los Angeles to Washington DC, by way of New York. The march, which aimed “to create the moral and political climate in the country, and in the world that will be watching” to make nuclear disarmament possible, would have “stars and ‘just folks’ mixed in together, just marching along for

¹⁶⁶ Allan Parachini, “For Top-Secret Narration, Call Charlton Heston,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1989, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-11-09/entertainment/ca-1378_1_charlton-heston. According to Parachini, the Q-clearance isn’t the only security clearance that Heston carried.

¹⁶⁷ Jon Morgan, “Clancy says he, Moon not linked,” *The Baltimore Sun*, January 22, 1992, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1992-01-22/sports/1992022209_1_clancy-unification-church-moon; and Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 300.

¹⁶⁸ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 309-311.

peace.”¹⁶⁹ Network, a celebrity political organization which will be discussed shortly, was active both in and out of country, protesting nuclear testing in Nevada, nuclear power plants in Sacramento, and traveling to the Soviet Union in an effort to advocate for arms control under the umbrella of the organization SANE. Other celebrities, unaffiliated with Network, were also involved in protests at the Nevada Test Site.¹⁷⁰

In January of 1987, for example, Martin Sheen was arrested, along with 71 others, in a demonstration marking the 36th anniversary of the first nuclear test to occur on the site. Charged with threatening to commit a crime against a person or property, Sheen had said in a television interview prior to the demonstration that he “hopefully will commit civil disobedience.”¹⁷¹ On February 5th of that same year Sheen participated in another protest, joining a group of roughly 2,000 demonstrators, including six members of congress, to protest “the Reagan Administration’s resumption of nuclear weapons testing despite a Soviet moratorium on the testing of new weapons.”¹⁷² Sheen was once again arrested—this time along with 438 others, including fellow notables astronomer Carl Sagan, singer Kris Kristofferson, and actor Robert Blake—for attempted trespassing when he “stepped across the cattle guard forming the border of the test site.”¹⁷³ Those arrested were taken in buses to a nearby town, booked, and released to face trial at a later

¹⁶⁹ Kathleen Hendrix, “Marchers’ Credibility on the Line,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1985, F1. The language of the *Times* article clearly harkening back to that in articles about the March on Washington.

¹⁷⁰ Formerly known as the Nevada Proving Grounds and located roughly 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, the Nevada Test Site had been the location for testing nuclear devices since the early 1950s. The underground testing of weapons ended September 23, 1992; however, from 1986 to 1994 a total of 536 demonstrations by various nuclear disarmament groups were held at the Nevada Test Site.

¹⁷¹ “Actor and 71 Other Protestors Arrested at Nuclear Test Site,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/28/us/actor-and-71-other-protesters-arrested-at-nuclear-test-site.html>.

¹⁷² Robert Lindsey, “438 Protesters Are Arrested at Nevada Nuclear Test Site,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/06/us/438-protesters-are-arrested-at-nevada-nuclear-test-site.html>.

¹⁷³ “Biggest demonstration yet at test site,” *Mohave Daily Miner*, February 6, 1987, A2.

date. While celebrity participation in the nuclear disarmament movement generally waned with the transition from the Reagan to Clinton administrations and thereafter, Sheen remained at least peripherally involved, participating in a demonstration at the Nevada Test Site in 2005 to mark the 60th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to call for a worldwide ban on nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁴

The Reagan administration's anti-Communist position as it played out in Central America, widely criticized by many human rights and anti-war activists, was also unpopular with many celebrities, who feared that any sort of intervention into El Salvador or Nicaragua would turn those countries into another Vietnam. While finding themselves in opposition to the foreign policies of the Reagan administration, the political activism of these celebrities was noticeably restrained from protests against Vietnam less than a decade prior—celebrities most typically chose to strictly lend their names and money to the issues surrounding US involvement in Central America. In 1981, well-recognized public figures ranging from Kurt Vonnegut to Erica Jong to Harry Belafonte joined almost 200 others in signing a *New York Times* advertisement, entitled “Let the People of El Salvador Decide.”¹⁷⁵ Criticizing the US's support of the junta in El Salvador, the advertisement read, “The recent decision to restore and increase US military aid to El Salvador is a dangerous step toward the involvement of the United States in the endless morass of another Vietnam.”¹⁷⁶ Carroll O'Connor, who at the time was best-known for

¹⁷⁴ Barry Massey, “Survivors Join Activists, Call for Ban on Nukes on Anniversary of Atomic Blasts,” *Common Dreams*, August 7, 2005, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0807-02.htm>.

¹⁷⁵ The celebrities would be joined by politicians, religious and labor leaders, and academics—including James Noonan, Julian Bond, Dr. Linus Pauling, Dr. Benjamin Spock, and George Wald.

¹⁷⁶ “From Asner to Vonnegut, Belafonte to Spock: Echoes of Vietnam: Celebrities Want U.S. Out of El Salvador,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1981, A4.

playing the role of Archie Bunker, wrote a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* expressing his opinions on why the US should not support the junta in El Salvador—which echoed that of many of the signers. Comparing the junta to organized crime in the US, O’Connor wrote, “Somebody ought to give a damn...about the helpless little people who are being people who are being killed down there—whose streets and homes and churches are being shot up daily by the top mob, the so-called government.”¹⁷⁷ In February 1982, Ed Asner, then-president of SAG, and a small group of celebrities appeared outside the State Department to present a check for \$25,000 to Medical Aid for El Salvador, a group that provided medical supplies to the rebels fighting the US-backed government. The action apparently left President Reagan “very disturbed.”¹⁷⁸

Actor Mike Farrell was another celebrity politically opposed to US involvement in El Salvador and Nicaragua and publicly supported the Committee of Concern for Central America.¹⁷⁹ Best known for his role as Captain Hunnicutt on the television series *M*A*S*H*, Farrell’s critique would have been lent a degree of legitimacy from his time playing one of the voices of reason on the widely-beloved series, whose series finale in 1983 had the largest viewing audience to date. Taking a more active approach in his opposition than some of his fellow celebrities, in April of 1985 Farrell, pairing up with *Falcon’s Crest* star Robert Foxworth, publicly debated Republican Representatives Robert Dornan (CA) and Dan Burton (IN) on the topic of US aid to anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua. Sponsored by Democratic Representatives Richard Gephardt, David

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 290.

¹⁷⁹ Farrell’s political activism pre-dates his fame.

Bonoir, and Michael Barnes, the debaters “disagreed on nearly everything, including whether the Sandinistas or the Contra resistance fighters are the worst human rights violators and which political forces have the greatest popular support in Nicaragua.”¹⁸⁰ When Rep. Dornan suggested that Farrell’s position as a well-known actor “allowed him disproportionate media coverage,” Farrell countered with “It seems to me, sir, your point of view has had plenty of opportunity to get before the cameras because of the very persuasive man in the White House.”¹⁸¹ Dornan conceded the debate. Farrell, taking the middle road between the position of celebrities as ordinary and celebrities as unique, would never suggest that he had any sort of special charisma but was rather a normal person who happened to be in an advantageous position, claiming that, “I’m no different from anyone else, except for this weird thing that has happened in my life...I got lucky and got a job that elevated me to prominence in a business that seems to have magical qualities attached to it in some people’s minds.”¹⁸² Being in a position of prominence, Farrell believed that “since he has the public’s eye anyway, he might as well share some of what he thinks and knows,” even if he had little expertise, which he “readily admits.”¹⁸³ However, like the debate between Paul Newman and Charlton Heston, it would seemingly be difficult for the average citizen-subject to make the distinction between expert and non-expert—particularly since he was directly engaged in debate with individuals who held recognizable political power and (presumably) expertise.

¹⁸⁰ Jay Arnold, “Farrell, Rep. Dornan Spar Over US Role in Nicaragua,” *Associated Press*, April 16, 1985, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1985/Farrell-Rep-Dornan-Spar-Over-US-Role-In-Nicaragua/id-263cdefb3107006364e1a183f08a848d>.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Eric Sorensen, “Might as well share opinion, says TV star,” *Spokane Chronicle*, April 30, 1991, B2

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Farrell would continue to actively oppose US involvement in Central America throughout the 1980s, participating in humanitarian trips to El Salvador and Nicaragua so that he could “see for himself the problems plaguing the people who live there.”¹⁸⁴

In September of 1985 Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden created Network, which can essentially be thought of as a ‘catchall’ liberal political organization made up of celebrities.¹⁸⁵ A venture fueled in part by a sense of self-importance of their own political legacy as much as a valuing of the political circles in which Hayden and Fonda were involved, the two were interested in politicizing celebrities and specifically in courting members of the “Brat Pack,” such as Tom Cruise, Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, and Rosanna Arquette, in the hopes of building a “movement that would last long after they retired.”¹⁸⁶ This effort at recruiting young celebrities was important because “by exposing young Hollywood to politics through their prism, they focused what might have remained undirected interest.”¹⁸⁷ Fonda believed that political activism not only would “deepen their ability as actors” but she would also explain to new members that:

People know us and in some instances like us because of what they see on TV or on the screen. They want to hear what we have to say, and if we say it right and we know what we’re talking about, we can persuade other people to join the cause.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Ben Fenwick, “Mike Farrell: *M*A*S*H* Star Now Friend of the Oppressed,” *NewsOK*, March 27, 1989, <http://newsok.com/mike-farrell-mash-star-now-friend-of-oppressed/article/2260384>; See also: Sorensen, “Might as well share opinion...” Farrell visited Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in 1982, El Salvador in 1983, El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1984, El Salvador in 1985, Paraguay and Chile in 1986, and El Salvador in 1989. He also visited various countries in the Middle East and Africa during this time period on humanitarian/human rights trips. See: <http://www.mikefarrell.org/activist/humanrights.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Ronald Brownstein writes that Fonda and Hayden wanted “to see if they couldn’t convert the Breakfast Club into the Hollywood equivalent of an Americans for Democratic Action chapter.” *The Power and the Glitter*, 294.

¹⁸⁶ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 260.

¹⁸⁷ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 297.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

This is clearly a continuation of the logic behind Hayden's argument in favor of allowing Fonda to visit North Vietnam in the early 1970s—that celebrities hold a position of cultural power which makes them particularly suited for both relaying a particular political message and attracting average citizen-subjects to a given cause—and which had been variously rearticulated by others, including Paul Newman and Mike Farrell. While very few people might remember Network today, many do remember what was done and said by the individual celebrities involved, perhaps an attestation of the logic articulated by Fonda, et al.

Young celebrities such as Meg Ryan, Sarah Jessica Parker, Alec Baldwin, Demi Moore, and Michael J. Fox who had not previously been politically active were attracted to Network and joined its ranks; it reached a point where “most of the ascending stars flocked not to Reagan but to Network,” and their presence drew fan attention to whichever cause Network was focused on at the moment.¹⁸⁹ Besides their anti-nuclear efforts, Network was active around such issues as opposing the nomination of conservative Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, fundraising for the anti-apartheid movement, and working to shape a more progressive Democratic Party, with the organization's members simultaneously serving as activists and “bait for the media.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 296. When Network went to Sacramento to support a clean water initiative, the young celebrities drew a crowd of 5,000 people into the streets and, according to Hayden, “created a huge motivation for young people to get involved when the celebrities were gone.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*, 295.

According to Tom Hayden, Network “eventually grew so big...it became a Democratic Party department and various Hollywood people duplicated the same thing.”¹⁹¹

While Hayden might have overestimated the effectiveness of Network in terms of Democratic politics, the fact is that basically an entire generation of Hollywood celebrities was politicized by and through their affiliation with the organization.

Members of Network started their own organization, for example, separate from Fonda and Hayden, Young Artists United (YAU), which “avoided partisan politics” and played to the strengths of participants: celebrity speakers would go into high schools and colleges to talk about issues pertinent to youth, including sex and drugs. Members of YAU tried to balance their political beliefs with their on-screen personas, worried about being adequate role models, and ultimately questioned the nature of their cause.

Alexander Paul, one of YAU’s founding members, wondered about the merging of celebrity and politics, as the world of celebrity is typically equated with fun, “How do you make people care enough to do it even if it is not fun? The point is, it is very serious business.”¹⁹² In 1988, YAU apparently attempted to answer this question in a televised Public Service Announcement (PSA) entitled “It’s cool to care.”¹⁹³

While the celebrity political activism of Network and surrounding such issues as nuclear disarmament and US policies in Central America mirrored the political causes

¹⁹¹ Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, 261. Brownstein argues that Hayden actually made Network less progressive and more mainstream Democratic. See *The Power and the Glitter*, 299-302.

¹⁹² Ibid., 298.

¹⁹³ Directed by D. J. Caruso. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V74o_hRJ-hI. Perhaps rather ironically a recent youtube.com user comment reads: “As young as I am, this commercial really touches me. Unfortunately, in my own generation it's not cool to care. In fact, it seems like in this day and age, having a caring bone in your body will get you ridiculed and called ‘soft’. In fact, that old saying ‘nice guys finish last’ can't be more true in this day and age. Giving a damn just isn't respectable anymore. It's really sad.....”

favored by the average citizen-subject population, during this time period we also begin to see celebrity politics taking up less mainstream or popular political issues; one such issue being HIV/AIDS. Rock Hudson's death due to an AIDS-related illness in October of 1985 helped bring HIV/AIDS into the public spotlight; not only was Hudson the first public figure to die from an AIDS-related illness, but President Reagan was yet to publicly mention it, only doing so for the first time in 1986.¹⁹⁴ Shortly after Hudson's death, former co-star Elizabeth Taylor began the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) with Dr. Mathilde Krim.¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth Taylor had been one of the very first celebrities to acknowledge the virus, active with AIDS Project Los Angeles prior to Hudson's death in 1984. Her peers met Taylor's early participation in fundraising and advocacy with derision and she is quoted in *Newsweek* as saying that her friends would call her to tell her not to "go near this one (an AIDS fund-raiser). It's not a sympathetic charity... Then a couple of months before the (AIDS benefit) dinner it came out that Rock had AIDS. All of a sudden the city did a total, spin, It was like 'Oh, one of us got it, it's not just bums in the gutter.'"¹⁹⁶ Taylor would go on to start her own organization, the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation in 1991, and was awarded the Jean Hersholt Award

¹⁹⁴ <http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>.

¹⁹⁵ amfAR was the result of the merging of the AIDS Medical Foundation and the National AIDS Research Foundation. <http://www.amfar.org/About-amfar/Introduction-and-History/>. A description of *The Battle of amfAR*, a 2013 documentary on the organization, describes the origin story as follows: "When AIDS strikes, two very different women—Hollywood icon Elizabeth Taylor and research scientist Dr. Mathilde Krim—join forces to create America's first AIDS research foundation." See: http://www.tellingpictures.com/films/show/the_battle_of_amfar#about.

¹⁹⁶ "Army Archerd, 'Twenty Years with AIDS And H'W'D,'" in *Hollywood and Politics: A Sourcebook*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Emilie Raymond, 90.

for Humanitarian work by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1993 for her HIV/AIDS work.¹⁹⁷

Taylor's early activism and advocacy around HIV/AIDS is worth noting not because the virus became a popular political concern for celebrities in the mid-80s—which doesn't happen until later (and, in its current manifestation, arguably most frequently under the auspices of humanitarianism abroad)—but, rather that Taylor marks another moment where the potential political power of the celebrity is acknowledged as well as an early moment of celebrity politics being untethered from larger, popular political causes.¹⁹⁸ In the case of HIV/AIDS, Taylor was not just ahead of other mainstream celebrities in her activism, but both (public efforts by the) state and the general American public as well, who in 1985 barely understood how the virus was transmitted (and by whom) let alone actively working for its eradication.

By the end of the decade Reagan had left office, to be replaced by his Vice President, George H. W. Bush. Celebrity involvement in politics generally slowed down. The first Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm (August 1990-February 1991), was met with little celebrity response. And the celebrity response that did occur by actors such as Woody Harrelson, Ed Asner, Robert Foxworth, and Mike Farrell was more restrained than had occurred in the past three decades. This difference in celebrity anti-war activism was pointed out by a *Washington Post* article, which suggested that, "...any public anti-war talk has been measured, calm and devoid of the emotion that has

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/about/awards/hersholt.html>.

¹⁹⁸ amfAR's instagram, which is full of images of their celebrity supporters, notes this shift—the 'American' part of the organization's name is no longer present and it stresses the global nature of the work done.

characterized previous anti-war efforts—whether it was Vietnam or El Salvador—undertaken by celebrities. Nor is the tenor of the protest anti-establishment.”¹⁹⁹ The article goes on to note that “the entertainment community’s most visible liberals are maintaining low profiles when it comes to the war;” in particular, “Jane Fonda has said nothing.”²⁰⁰ This is not to say that celebrities weren’t politically involved, rather that there were very few issues that drew the attention of celebrities en masse as there previously had been.²⁰¹

The presidential election of Bill Clinton attracted celebrities, who campaigned, performed, and fundraised for the candidate. While his candidacy was still in its infancy, Clinton was the frontrunner of the Democratic presidential contenders with Hollywood supporters, sponsored by celebrities such as Chevy Chase, Richard Dreyfuss, and Neil Simon.²⁰² Arguably many celebrities, with the exception of Charlton Heston and a small number of other conservatives, tended to espouse a more politically liberal ideology

¹⁹⁹ Carla Hall, “Quiet on the Wartime Set,” *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1991, D2.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Examples of some of the isolated political/humanitarian issues taken up by celebrities in the 1990s: Richard Gere joined the International Campaign for Tibet in 1992 and became the organization’s Board Chairman in 1995; Charlton Heston, a long-time gun rights activist, became the vocal president of the NRA in 1998—and serving for five years—raising the membership ranks even after such events as the shootings at Columbine High School; and Ellen DeGeneres publicly came out on her sitcom *Ellen* in April of 1997. It can be assumed that celebrities also continued to contribute monetarily to political and social causes throughout the decade. However, because celebrities weren’t being drawn to larger issues in groups nor were the day-to-day politics of celebrities tracked in the 1990s in the same way that they are in the twenty-first century (due largely to technological advancements), there really is not the type of documentation of celebrity politics as there was before or since.

²⁰² Lois Romano, “The Democrats, Movin’ and Shakin’ Down Movieland,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 1992, C3. See also: Scott Armstrong, “Wealthy California Viewed as the ATM Of American Politics,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 5, 1992, 10. It should be noted that Clinton’s oldest friend and optometrist was the brother of Harry Thomason, executive producer of *Designing Women*; Thomason and his wife—co-producers of multiple hit sitcoms—vied to be “first in line to become the First Celebrities of the Clinton White House.” Thomason introduced Clinton when he first announced his candidacy and, until they had to stop due to FCC fairness regulations, a *Designing Women* character frequently mentioned knowing the candidate. Half-brother Roger was even made a production-assistant on the set. See Romano, “The Clintons’ Hollywood Agents,” *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1992, D3.

(albeit a fairly normative one) and so backing Clinton was not unexpected.²⁰³ Celebrities did not, however, immediately throw all of their social (and financial) capital behind the candidate—four months out from the 1992 election a *Washington Post* story noted that Clinton was receiving “tepid reviews” from “the circle of liberal actors, producers, directors and writers that has been a reliable source of money and celebrity endorsements...”²⁰⁴ Many celebrities, like many other voters, especially those who had a history of political activism, claimed they would definitely vote for Clinton but perceived the candidate, with his connections to the Democratic Leadership Council, as a centrist.²⁰⁵

Recognizing the power of celebrity, as well as the import of politics in the lives of celebrities, in a speech delivered at a fundraiser Clinton promised celebrities that, “I want you to be a part of the administration, not just a part of a winning campaign.”²⁰⁶ Whether it was this promise or something else that changed the tide of celebrity opinion, by the time it was two months out from the national election celebrities had come out in force for Clinton. A fundraiser in September saw celebrities such as Steven Spielberg, Candice Bergen, and Jack Nicholson in attendance, Barbara Streisand and Dionne Warwick performing, and Warren Beatty, Michelle Pfeiffer, Dustin Hoffman, Quincy Jones, Rhea Perlman, and Annette Bening (amongst others) speaking on Clinton’s behalf. In his own

²⁰³ As Alessandra Stanley points out, although Los Angeles and Orange Counties might house some of the “most conservative communities in the country...Hollywood has always been a liberal enclave” and that in Hollywood “conservatives complain that they are viewed with the same alarm and mistrust as leftists were in the 1940’s and 1950’s.” Furthermore, Hollywood conservatives find themselves often perceived as not being compassionate by their liberal peers. “Hidden Hollywood: Political conservatives in the film industry say they are out of fashion,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 1992, V1.

²⁰⁴ John E. Yang, “Hollywood Unhitched to the Star,” *The Washington Post*, July 9, 1992, C1.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ John F. Harris, “Bill Clinton’s Night in Starlight,” *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1995, D1.

on-stage remarks, Clinton joked that he had “always aspired to be in the cultural elite that others condemn,” while earlier Whoopi Goldberg had reassured the candidate that he didn’t “have to prove how hip you are—you’re here.”²⁰⁷ And two days before the election, Hollywood celebrities and musicians gathered at the Meadowlands to stump for the candidate; Thelonus Monk Jr. quipped that “we think it is about time that we had a good jazz saxophonist in the White House,” in a pitch at the event.²⁰⁸ It was during the Clinton campaign that Hollywood began to be known as “Washington’s ATM,” becoming a major source of funding for the Democratic Party in particular.²⁰⁹

Clinton appealed to young voters—this was in part because the younger candidate was fashioned as “hip” through his association with Hollywood celebrities as well as through the work of the non-partisan organization, Rock the Vote. The brainchild of a Virgin Records executive and a campaign worker, Rock the Vote aimed to “motivate and mobilize” young voters around issues that mattered to them, using Hollywood actors (typically, but not always, young—recalling the strategy of Network) and musicians to transmit pleas for the youth to vote. Leading up to the 1992 election, Rock the Vote produced PSAs featuring musical artists such as Aerosmith, Queen Latifah, Eddie Vedder, and REM, which aired on youth-centric networks such as MTV, VH-1, BET, and Fox.²¹⁰ Fox also aired an hour long Rock the Vote television special hosted by Queen Latifah, with appearances by such celebrities as Madonna, Robin Williams, Tom Cruise,

²⁰⁷ Carla Hall, “A Clear Night For Clinton,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1992, C1.

²⁰⁸ Gwen Ifill, “Clinton Rallies Supporters for Final ‘Long Walk’,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/02/us/the-1992-campaign-the-democrats-clinton-rallies-supporters-for-final-long-walk.html>.

²⁰⁹ See Timothy Stanley, *Citizen Hollywood: How the Collaboration Between LA and DC Revolutionized American Politics*, 36-44.

²¹⁰ <http://www.rockthevote.com/about/history-rock-the-vote/#1992>.

and Chris Rock.²¹¹ As a *Chicago Tribune* article phrased it, “Jesse Jackson is no longer alone when he preaches the importance of the vote—Madonna, Aerosmith, and other music superstars are pitching the same message directly over the airwaves.”²¹² Clinton made the wise decision to capitalize on MTV’s offer to appear on the network—an offer that Bush declined—placing the Democratic candidate in the same visual space as the Hollywood celebrities and musicians pleading for viewers to ‘just’ vote. In total 350,000 young people were registered by Rock the Vote and its partner organizations and they take credit for a 20 percent increase in youth turnout at the polls on voting day, compared to previous elections, which worked in Clinton’s favor.²¹³ Clinton beat incumbent Bush and his first inauguration saw “whole air forces of the high and the mighty of American pop culture...swoop in,” signaling the new President-elect’s own celebrity of sorts.²¹⁴ While Clinton did not begin his campaign with the cultural capital of a celebrity, as did Reagan, he gained a bit of it through his association with and endorsement by celebrities, with which he was able to bolster his own public persona.

²¹¹ Ibid. This television special would go on to win a Peabody Award, as would short films produced by Rock the Vote in 1995 about health care issues entitled “Out of Order: Rock the Vote Targets Health.”

²¹² Adam Wolfberg, “Young People Could Rock the Vote,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1992, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1992-10-19/news/9204040619_1_college-democrats-young-people-poll.

²¹³ Clinton was aware of the role that Rock the Vote played in his election, signing two bills early on that were lobbied for by the organization—the Motor Voter Bill and the National Community Service Trust Act. <http://www.rockthevote.com/about/history-rock-the-vote/#1992>. In 2000 Clinton was given the “Rock the Nation” award at a ceremony in which Bono and Sting were also honored.

²¹⁴ Phil McCombs, “On the Tarmac, Big Stars Descend From the Heavens,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1993, C1. The celebrity presence at the Clinton inauguration and the political celebrity of Clinton were widely covered in January 1993. See also: Bernard Weinraub, “Hollywood Crowd Gives Capital Two Thumbs Up,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1993, A15; Patricia Leigh Brown, “Clear Sky, With Stars on the Ground,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 1993, A15; Michele L. Norris and Jacqueline Trescott, “Inaugural Talent Tally,” *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1993, C2; and Bernard Weinraub, “This Inaugural Thing Just Irks Hollywood,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1993.

Clinton's popularity with celebrities would not maintain the same degree of frenetic support over the course of his two terms in office, due in large part because they were generally dismayed with the President's performance.²¹⁵ However, they continued to come out to support him monetarily—especially with the rise of Newt Gingrich. Although celebrity support for Clinton was not as passionate the second time around, “the stakes are much higher...The specter of a Republican Congress and a Republican president is of great concern to this community...they are red hot in disdain for Gingrich.”²¹⁶ Celebrities thus continued to maintain a connection to the White House throughout the 1990s, which would change with the election of George W. Bush and, more specifically, with the Bush administration's War on Terror.

Conclusion

The proliferation of celebrity political participation that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially as it increased and spread in last two decades or so—becoming more mainstream and centrist in the process—has led to the normalization and prominence of the public celebrity as political agent in contemporary American life with which this chapter began. As we now expect and are accustomed to seeing politicized celebrities, the unconventionality of their political participation has also largely worn off; what should now be important is not so much *that* they participate in politics but the form that this political participation takes. Correspondingly, because of the potential influence celebrities can have on the politics of average citizen-subjects, it is important that we

²¹⁵ See Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter*; and Harris, “Bill Clinton's Night in Starlight.”

²¹⁶ Harris, “Bill Clinton's Night in Starlight.”

understand the ways in which this influence can and does occur. The next three chapters will focus on what I argue are the three most prominent forms or models that celebrity politics have taken in the twenty-first century: liberal democratic, neoliberal, and hybrid. These models, while having their own distinct contours, articulate wider political trends in contemporary America. And, although threads of each model can be traced back to some of the moments discussed in this chapter, it is precisely the lack of novelty of celebrity politics since the turn of the most recent century that has allowed for their crystallization into distinct models.

Chapter Two: Liberal Democratic Celebrity Politics take on the War on Terror

Mr. Rogen Goes to Washington

Appearing before a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services hearing regarding Alzheimer's disease alongside National Institutes of Health Director Dr. Francis Collins and former Congressman Dennis Moore (currently living with Alzheimer's), comedic actor Seth Rogen began by thanking those in attendance for "...the opportunity to testify today and for the opportunity for me to be called an expert at something because that's cool... Yes, I'm aware this has nothing to do with the legalization of marijuana," showing Rogen's confidence in the fact that at least a portion of the committee members would have some sort of familiarity with his typical filmic role.²¹⁷ Using his experiences with his wife's mother who was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's almost nine years prior to the actor's February 2014 Senate appearance to personalize his testimony, Rogen claimed that his mother-in-law's situation was "so dire, that it caused me, a lazy, self-involved, generally self-medicated man-child, to start

²¹⁷ Ken Lombardi, "Seth Rogen pleads with Congress over Alzheimer's, slams low-senator turnout," *CBS News*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/seth-rogen-pleads-congress-over-alzheimers-slams-low-senator-turnout/>; "DC duel: Seth Rogen blasts senators for skipping his testimony; Ben Affleck plays to packed house," *Fox News*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2014/02/27/seth-rogen-talks-about-alzheimers-disease-at-senate-hearing-calls-out-senators/>. The National Alzheimer's Association refers to Rogen as their "celebrity Champion." http://www.alz.org/news_and_events_seth_rogen_hearing.asp.

an entire charity organization,” the celebrity-stacked Hilarity for Charity.²¹⁸ Rogen made it clear in his opening remarks that decreasing the costs for Alzheimer’s care and increasing the funding for adequate treatment and prevention should be taken up with more urgency by the federal government instead of being bankrolled by charities or private individuals. Acknowledging that as a successful actor his income levels afford his family the ability to pay for care, Rogen noted that, “if the American people ever decide to reject genitalia driven comedy, I would no longer be able to afford it.”²¹⁹ Suggesting that the American people both mirror the actions of their government, whispering the word Alzheimer’s because “their government whispers the word Alzheimer’s,” and look to it for hope, Rogen concluded by stating that “I dream of a day when my charity is no longer necessary and I can go back to being the lazy, self-involved man-child I was meant to be.”²²⁰

While Rogen’s remarks were clearly laced with the type of sophomoric, self-deprecating humor which he is best-known for, the content of those remarks were not intended to be taken in jest; news media coverage of the hearing consistently referred to Rogen’s testimony as both “serious” and “emotional.”²²¹ However, by the time he was

²¹⁸ “DC duel.” Most recently Hilarity for Charity hosted a Bar Mitzvah for adult actor James Franco as part of their annual fundraising variety show. Shalini Dore, “Seth Rogen and Lauren Miller Rogen’s Hilarity for Charity Will Throw a Bar Mitzvah for James Franco,” *Variety*, July 21, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/vpage/james-franco-seth-rogen-bar-mitzvah-hilarity-for-charity-1201545043/>.

²¹⁹ “Seth Rogen Opening Statement,” *C-SPAN Transcription*, February 26, 2014, <http://lybio.net/tag/seth-rogen-opening-statement-c-span-transcription/>.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ See for example: Faith Boone, “Actor Seth Rogen gives opening statement before Senate on Alzheimer’s Research,” *ABC News*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/actor-seth-rogen-gives-opening-statement-before-senate-on-alzheimers-research>; Joshua Gardner, “Funnymen Seth Rogen attacks US Senators for WALKING OUT of his emotional Capitol Hill plea about Alzheimer’s, based on mother-in-law’s struggle with illness,” *The Daily Mail*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2569000/Actor-Seth-Rogen-calls-U-S-Senators-walking->

finished speaking, only two of the eighteen committee members were still in their chairs. While a few committee members were not present to begin with, the others actually got up and left during Rogen's remarks (with a few falling asleep prior to their early exits); Iowa Democrat Tom Harkin and Kansas Republican Jerry Moran were the two lone bodies remaining.²²² After the hearing, Rogen took to social media, using his power as a celebrity to broadcast to his 2.55 million Twitter followers his disgust with the senators who left:

Not sure why only two senators were at the hearing. Very symbolic of how the Government views Alzheimer's. Seems to be a low priority.²²³

Acknowledging Rogen's reach as a celebrity, and consequently the damage bad 'press' from Rogen could cause, Illinois Republican Mark Kirk, one of the senators who left early, tweeted a message to Rogen (and obviously his own constituents), writing:

Thanks to @Sethrogen for speaking out about efforts to #ENDALZ. RT if you know someone affected by #Alzheimers.²²⁴

Rogen responded to Kirk:

@SenatorKirk pleasure meeting you. Why did you leave before my speech? Just curious.²²⁵

Rogen then tweeted a picture of the (mostly) empty row of subcommittee seats with the following text:

emotional-plea-Alzheimers-disease.html; and Paige Lavender, "Seth Rogen Publicly Shames Senators After They Walk Out On His Testimony," *The Huffington Post*, February 27, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/27/seth-rogen-alzheimers_n_4868937.html.

²²² Gardner, "Funnymen Seth Rogen attacks US Senators for WALKING OUT." In this article, Gardner provides an entire list of the Senators who either did not show up or left early.

²²³ Ibid; Brett Malec, "Seth Rogen Blasts Senators for Not Attending His Senate Hearing on Alzheimer's Disease," *E! News*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.eonline.com/news/515732/seth-rogen-blasts-senators-for-not-attending-his-senate-hearing-on-alzheimer-s-disease>.

²²⁴ Malec, "Seth Rogen Blasts Senators."

²²⁵ Ibid.

All those empty seats are senators who are not prioritizing Alzheimer's.
Unless more noise is made, it won't change.²²⁶

Later that evening Rogen appeared on MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Matthews* to further publicize his cause, again stressing Alzheimer's economic impact on families and the need for increased governmental funding as issues of national interest, social welfare, and the public good. When Matthews steered the conversation to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing and the conspicuously absent senators, Matthews remarked "You're a movie star. Usually the senators at least show up when the cameras are there," acknowledging both the regularity with which senators come and go during hearings and the impact that a celebrity presence typically has on a hearing's attendance.²²⁷ The interview ended with both Rogen and Matthews issuing a plea for participatory action on behalf of Matthews' viewing audience, asking them to write or call their senators.

After the first couple of days media coverage all but disappeared. However, an article on the *Huffington Post* resurrected Rogen's Alzheimer's activism to make it about American versus North Korean freedoms in light of the scandal surrounding Rogen's most recent film, *The Interview*, concluding that:

...the DPRK leadership neither knows nor cares not a speck about Seth Rogen's other life, the one outside Hollywood, where his compassion and commitment to the fight against Alzheimer's is truly making a

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ "Seth Rogen on Alzheimer's Research: We need to educate people," *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.msnbc.com/hardball/watch/rogen-we-need-education-on-alzheimers-172193859976>. As NPR's coverage of the Rogen story makes clear, a celebrity testifying about an issue that is important to them is not unusual. Carly Cody, "Seth Rogen Tees Off On Senators Who Walked Out On His Testimony," *NPR*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2014/02/27/283464503/seth-rogen-tees-off-on-senators-who-walked-out-on-his-testimony>.

difference...that can only thrive where there is robust engagement between the public and private sectors and a fully engaged civil society.²²⁸

The fact that American leadership failed to show engagement was erased from the narrative.

Defining Liberal Democratic Celebrity Politics

In many ways, the form of Seth Rogen's advocacy for individuals with Alzheimer's is the perfect encapsulation of twenty-first century liberal democratic celebrity politics (hereafter referred to as LDC). Similar to the celebrity politics of the post-WWII era discussed in the previous chapter, liberal democratic politics are centered on issues of rights and liberties. Celebrity politics that fit into this political model are heavily invested in enforcing issues of justice, human rights, civil rights, and political freedoms for all peoples. Thus many of the issues that celebrities rally around in liberal democratic politics are expressed as being fundamentally about equality. While Lisa Duggan has suggested that equality is also a core component of neoliberalism, within liberal democratic politics this equality does not take the "stripped-down, nonredistributive form" it does in other political models, particularly neoliberal political models.²²⁹ Consequentially, rather than being strictly concerned with the atomized individual within the liberal democratic model it is understood that the collective whole needs to work within, on, and with the state to foster and maintain a healthy, functioning social body. Accordingly, individual freedoms are insured through collective politics.

²²⁸ Michael Hodin, "Seth Rogen Leads The Fight Against Alzheimer's," *The Huffington Post*, January 4, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-hodin/seth-rogen-alzheimers_b_6391508.html.

²²⁹ Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, XII.

It perhaps goes without saying that the specter haunting all LDC politics, especially in discussions of equality, is the position of cultural and material privilege that celebrities occupy. While “celebrity” in the abstract sense is absolutely also used in neoliberal political models—the fact that these individuals are celebrities and therefore ‘special’ in some sense of the term is never *unacknowledged*—within the liberal democratic model, the particular positionality of the celebrity is converted into actionable forms of political leverage and serves three main roles.²³⁰ First, celebrities can be a point of inspiration for the politicization of ‘average’ citizen subjects (both as a means of drawing awareness to or interest in an issue and inciting action). Second, celebrities form a bridge between the state or politicians and ‘average’ citizen-subjects (where the ‘specialness’ of the celebrity is understood to equal greater access). Finally, celebrities serve as allies to average citizen-subjects that exist outside the institutional political sphere but are often treated as having equal—or greater—power and influence.

An impetus to attempt to level some hierarchies and “redistribute *down*,” which is most clearly associated with the progressive social movements of the 1960s, seems to be a consistent thrust of LDC causes; however, *what* any given celebrity cause is interested in redistributing, be it freedom, political power, or capital (physical or cultural), can vary greatly.²³¹ Although contemporary LDC politics share the downward redistributive thrust of many of the social movements of the 1960s, as a whole the politics tend to be less radical overall than their predecessors—kernels of radicalism are typically tempered by

²³⁰ ‘Actionable’ politics/political leverage is the key in this instance, as within neoliberalism there is a general push for depoliticization—as will be addressed in the next chapter.

²³¹ Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality*, XVII.

and through the celebrity's position in the public eye. It bears repeating that as culturally constructed and perpetuated objects, celebrities are heavily dependent on public approval or, at the very least, a lack of marked public disapproval. Therefore overtly radical politics, and specifically radical politics that deviate from national political trends, can result not just in public censure but also in a loss of celebrity status for individual celebrities. And while there are liberal democratic organizations that are broad in scope, an organization's purview—especially as it is manifested in celebrity politics—is more likely to be fragmented. Celebrity political organizations tend to prioritize single-identities (such as gender or sexual orientation) or single-issues (often, but not always, tethered in some way to identity), championing their cause apart from other identities or issues. While the frequent single-issue focus of LDC politics might seem to be more concerned with narrow targeting specific populations than with equality per se, it is important to note that potential political victories are always articulated as a victory for the whole and thus ensuring a more equitable society.

The relationship of the individual to the collective as expressed through LDC politics is perhaps best understood as a blend of 1960s social movement politics with the identity politics that developed in the 1980s. Within this formation, issues of identity (and identity-based political organizations) are not meant to be balkanizing (a common critique of identity politics), so much as they are a concern for a society with a fully-invested civil rights. Instead, examples of LDC politics often embrace the type of identity-based politics that Jodi Dean refers to as “reflective solidarity,” albeit in a

watered down and perhaps less progressive form.²³² Reflective solidarity extends beyond “already given identity categories,” requiring a move from complacent toleration of difference “with critique and engagement.”²³³

LDC politics attempt, not necessarily always or in all ways successfully, to grapple with the inconsistencies between cultural and material conditions. This, combined with the focus on issues of equality, often leads to a sense of truth and rightness or righteousness in one’s political position. However, as much concerned with and invested in equality and the process of redistributing down as LDC politics might be, it is entrenched within a capitalist social system. Wendy Brown identifies this as the “Janus-faced potential” of liberal democratic politics in a capitalist society: “while liberal democracy encodes, reflects, and legitimates capitalist social relations, it simultaneously resists, counters, and tempers them.”²³⁴ LDC politics attempt through their push for “equality and freedom...[to]...figure an alternative vision of humanity and alternative social and moral referents to those of the capitalist order within which they are asserted.”²³⁵ This alternative vision is not revolutionary in nature, but rather works within and on the system, as it currently exists.

Contemporary LDC politics are therefore grounded in the belief that the state is able to be rescued or resuscitated and (perhaps with some prodding) capable of doing the ‘right thing.’ While LDC politics might find fault in a particular administration, specific government policies, or in exercises of state power perceived as arbitrary—such as was

²³² Jodi Dean, *The Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics*.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 178-180.

²³⁴ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, 46.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

commonly seen during the presidency of George W. Bush—the theory of the state is still understood overall as favorable and therefore as salvageable. This is because the government is recognized as possessing the ultimate power and authority to enforce any social change being sought, which ultimately benefits the collective and the individual. The concern with rights and liberties that are at the core of liberal democratic politics are enforced and insured by the state, suggesting that ultimately, such a political model agrees to a variation of what Wendy Brown refers to as “the politics of protection.”²³⁶ As such, the state and, as an extension, state institutions are believed to have a social mandate to see to and maintain the public good through various forms of regulation and social services—hence both Seth Rogen’s plea to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee and his shock at their apparent dismissal of his pleas and therefore the abdication of their responsibility—as the social body ultimately agrees to live under and by the rules of the state.

Finally, it should be noted that while many of the celebrities—and celebrity-driven or backed organizations—who embody the liberal democratic political model tend to fall on the left end of the political scale, this political distinction is not a necessary qualifier, as many left-leaning celebrities also support political causes that take on more neoliberal characteristics, as will be seen in chapter three.²³⁷ In much the same way that Duggan identifies the “domestic political language of two party electoral politics, a

²³⁶ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, 169. Under a politics of protection, “‘natural liberty’ is exchanged for the individual and collective security ostensibly guaranteed by the state.”

²³⁷ Wendy Brown labels this the “liberal tilt” of liberal democratic politics. “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” 39. And, as will be argued in the next chapter, many of the left leaning humanitarian political projects of celebrities often end up having a heavy neoliberal undergirding.

language that labels figures and initiatives as *conservative*, *moderate*, or *liberal*” as successfully obscuring “the stakes in policy disputes,” overly focusing on the left-right celebrity political orientation obscures the form of political model to which their actions adhere.²³⁸ And celebrity media coverage is particularly responsible for engaging, encouraging, and perpetuating this excessive emphasis on left-right political orientation on a regular basis.

The following chapters will move from twentieth to twenty-first century celebrity politics, looking especially at the political form of such politics. This chapter will explore the aspects of contemporary LDC politics discussed above through the primary example of the post-9/11 celebrity anti-war movement. While examples of LDC politics exist outside of the anti-war movement that developed post-9/11, such as the example of Seth Rogen and the fight for federal funding for Alzheimer’s research with which this chapter began, the anti-war movement is one of the best examples of the widespread crystallization of such a political model. Focusing on liberal democratic politics at multiple levels of celebrity participation and involvement—the more large scale anti-war organizations Artists United for Winning Without War, Musicians United for Winning Without War, and Not in Our Name and the smaller scale wave of realistic, anti-war narrative films that were released around this same period—this chapter will attempt to better understand the shape, function, and efficacy of such politics. In particular, it argues that that celebrities sought to leverage their cultural capital so as to give a

²³⁸ Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality*, xv. Duggan argues that this process is fundamental to neoliberal politics where the continuities between conservative and liberal administrations are “rendered relatively invisible by the dominant political system and language” and that the political conflicts between “Republicans and liberal Democrats have been shaped largely within the terms of neoliberalism.”

presence to a political position (and narrative of the War on Terror) that ran counter to the dominant-hegemonic narrative in ways that would resonate with average citizen-subjects, framing this alternative narrative in a language that articulates its liberal democratic influence.

Weapons of Mass Distraction: Celebrity and the Post-9/11 Anti-War Movement

Let it not be said that people in the United States did nothing when their government declared a war without limit and instituted stark new measures of repression...President Bush has declared: "you're either with us or against us." Here is our answer: We refuse to allow you to speak for all the American people. We will not give up our right to question. We will not hand over our consciences in return for a hollow promise of safety. We say NOT IN OUR NAME. We refuse to be party to these wars and we repudiate any inference that they are being waged in our name or for our welfare.

Not In Our Name, "Statement of Conscience"²³⁹

War talk in Washington is alarming and unnecessary...The valid U.S. and UN objective of disarming Saddam Hussein can be achieved through legal diplomatic means. There is no need for war. Let us instead devote ourselves to improving the security and well-being of people here at home and around the world.

Artists United to Win Without War, "Win Without War" Petition Letter²⁴⁰

In response to the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, then President George W. Bush launched an international military campaign designated as the "War on Terror," the two clearest instantiations of which were the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁴¹ The US invaded Afghanistan in October of 2001 as a response to the Taliban's refusal to turn over Osama bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qaeda to the US, who had been identified as the guilty parties behind the September 11th attacks.

²³⁹ Not in Our Name, "Statement of Conscience," <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news4/news170.html>.

²⁴⁰ Artists United to Win Without War, "Petition Letter," <http://civic.moveon.org/artistswinwithoutwar/>.

²⁴¹ The name "War on Terror" fell out of favor with the Obama administration, which preferred the even more abstract "Overseas Contingency Operation."

Operation Enduring Freedom, the name given to the military operation in Afghanistan, was backed by popular public support; in a Gallup poll conducted one month after the war in Afghanistan began, 89% of those polled claimed that the US was not mistaken in taking military action against Afghanistan.²⁴² While American public support for the war in Afghanistan dropped from the initially high 89% over the thirteen years that it was fought, support always hovered right around 50%—even in the last years preceding the US handing over its last military base in Afghanistan on October 26, 2014, 48% of those polled continued to believe that the war effort was not a mistake.²⁴³ Two years after war began in Afghanistan, the United States invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003, a military move that, like the war in Afghanistan, was couched as part of the larger efforts of the War on Terror; however, the Bush administration had to work harder to justify the necessity of entering Iraq. According to US intelligence, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was alleged to possess hidden stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (or as they are now more notoriously known, WMD), which could be deployed at will, and ties to terrorist organizations—framing Hussein as both culpable in the attacks of September 11th and capable of causing further devastation. This official intelligence was broadly disseminated via mainstream news media, creating a widely accepted narrative. For example, a CBS/*New York Times* poll conducted in January of 2003 found that only 4% of those polled believed that Saddam Hussein did *not* have weapons of mass

²⁴² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5257/war-terrorism.aspx>

²⁴³ Ibid. See also “Public Divided Over Afghan Troop Requests, But Still Sees Rationale for War,” November 5, 2009, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2009/11/05/public-divided-over-afghan-troop-requests-but-still-sees-rationale-for-war/>; “In U.S., More Support for Increasing Troops in Afghanistan,” November 25, 2009, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124490/In-U.S.-More-Support-Increasing-Troops-Afghanistan.aspx>

destruction.²⁴⁴ Having painted Iraq as a threat to the U.S., the U.K., and their allies, the dual menace of WMD and terrorism were used as the justification to go to war with the (nebulously) ultimate aim of “freeing” the Iraqi people.

While the War on Terror received general public support, due in no small part to mainstream news media coverage whose pro-Bush administration bias and misleading framing has been well documented, among others, it was not met without protest in the form of mainstream, left-leaning liberal democratic political organizations created expressly in response. This was particularly true for the war in Iraq.²⁴⁵ Anti-war organizations gave varied and wide-reaching reasons for opposing the post-9/11 ground wars, however a large number had an anti-US imperialism platform rooted in economic issues. A popular slogan leading up to and throughout the early years of the Iraq War was “No Blood for Oil,” equating the invasion with a natural resource grab, and many of the protest organizations cited the heavy corporate influence and participation (particularly in Iraq) and sweeping privatizations under a democratic guise as especially problematic.²⁴⁶ Although ‘neoliberalism’ was not a term widely-used by mainstream anti-war organizations, a great deal of the critique and protest waged against the war on terror was aimed at its perceived neoliberal elements—pitting liberal democracy and

²⁴⁴ Bootie Cosgrove-Mather, “Poll: Talk First, Fight Later,” *CBS News*, January 23, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-talk-first-fight-later>.

²⁴⁵ See for example: Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War, and Election*; and Sam Stein and Michael Calderone, “Media Shows Pro-War Bias in Covering Iraq,” *Popular Resistance*, June 27, 2014, <https://www.popularresistance.org/media-shows-pro-war-bias-in-covering-iraq/>. According to Barbara Epstein the movement against the war in Iraq in particular was the “largest antiwar movement that has ever taken place.” “Notes on the Antiwar Movement,” *Monthly Review*, Volume 55, Issue 03, July 2003, <http://monthlyreview.org/2003/07/01/notes-on-the-antiwar-movement/>.

²⁴⁶ This slogan was also used during the Persian Gulf War. See Mark Van Ells, “No Blood for Oil: Protesting the Persian Gulf War in Madison, Wisconsin,” *Journal of the Study for Peace and Conflict* (1998-1999), <http://jspc.library.wisc.edu/issues/1998-1999/article3.html>.

liberal democratic politics against the undemocratic techniques of the neoliberalism that many later identified as underpinning war-making in Iraq and the subsequent nation-state rebuilding.²⁴⁷

In the post-9/11 cultural climate, taking a public anti-war position could be a consequential decision for celebrities. This was especially true for those who wanted to maintain a broad appeal in the US, as protesting aspects of the War on Terror was contrary to both the accepted narrative of a *just* war and popular opinion more generally. However, celebrities participated in anti-war organizations both alongside and independent of other citizens. As I've already noted, three of the most prominent and public of these organizations were Not in Our Name, Artists United to Win Without War, and Musicians United to Win Without War.²⁴⁸ Even though there was crossover between the three organizations beyond political ideology—such as shared membership and participation of the organizations themselves in wider anti-war coalitions like United for Peace and Justice—the way that celebrity and celebrities functioned within the organizations differed. While Not in Our Name attracted politically engaged celebrity members as a means of bringing in 'average' American citizens as members, both Artists and Musicians United to Win Without War were seemingly formed as a way for

²⁴⁷ For more on the connections between the War in Iraq and neoliberalism, see for example: Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 142-150; Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy;" and Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 409-484;

²⁴⁸ While Ben Dickerson frames Artists United as foundationally being an anti-Bush organization under the "umbrella of the national Win Without War and MoveOn coalitions," committed to removing the president from office—a goal that they ultimately failed to meet. Seeing as the organization came into existence with Bush's build-up to war and all of their activity centered around the war in Iraq, this claim seems hard to justify and at the very least, one can not disentangle the Commander-in-Chief from the wars he wages—particularly when said wars monopolize foreign and domestic policy. Dickerson, *Hollywood's New Radicalism: War, Globalisation and the Movies from Reagan to George W. Bush*, 195.

celebrities to potentially mobilize around a cause they were passionate about *and* use their name recognition to influence citizens to actively take an anti-war position.²⁴⁹

Founded in March of 2002 as an outgrowth of the Artist's Network of Refuse and Resist (a politically radical human rights group founded in the late 1980s), Not in Our Name brought together a rather eclectic grouping of individuals—ranging from public intellectual Noam Chomsky to artist Barbara Kruger, from filmmaker Robert Altman to playwright Tony Kushner, and from Hip-Hop performer and actor Mos Def to actress Susan Sarandon.²⁵⁰ Not in Our Name was unique because it was one of the few organizations with a celebrity membership to publicly denounce the War on Terror and, more generally, the trajectory of the US government under the Bush Administration (particularly domestic measures such as the USA PATRIOT Act) so soon after 9/11 and were not organizationally solely focused on the Iraq War.²⁵¹ Celebrities, like the American citizenry more generally, were less likely to (at least publicly) be critical of the War on Terror and particularly the decision to invade Afghanistan and, as such, the celebrity anti-war protests that did occur in the post-9/11 period usually centered strictly

²⁴⁹ This is particularly true of Artists United, which will be discussed shortly.

²⁵⁰ Other listed members include: Ben Cohen (the co-founder of Ben & Jerry's) and Henry Foner, the former president of the Fur & Leather Workers Union. For a full list of signatories of the "Statement of Conscience," see <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news4/news170.html>. What is perhaps most interesting about the list of members is *how* each individual is listed—which individuals the organization felt it necessary to include a listed occupation after their name and which ones could stand on name alone. Whereas Adrienne Rich, Saul Landau, and Ani DiFranco were deemed well-known enough to just list their names, Terry Gilliam, Barbara Kruger and Howard Zinn all had an occupation listed after their names. I had to google Saul Landau.

²⁵¹ Not in Our Name disbanded in 2008, even though neither ground war had ended nor had the War on Terror officially been called off. One might read this as the organization pinning a great deal of hope on the Obama administration to drastically change the course of action undertaken by the previous administration.

on the war in Iraq.²⁵² As might be expected, the lead-up in the last quarter of 2002 to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the official name given to the American-led invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, made participation in Not in Our Name more attractive to a wider-range of celebrities. However, Not in Our Name never had the wide appeal (particularly with big-name celebrities) of the more politically mainstream Artists United to Win Without War and Musicians United to Win Without War, perhaps as a result of its broad anti-War on Terror stance.²⁵³ Those members of Not in Our Name that did have greater name recognition were ones that tended to be more politically progressive—by average American standards and not necessarily *actually* radical per se, even though Not in Our Name’s parent organization was known for having a radical politics—and were well-known for having this type of political orientation pre-9/11; this includes such members as Tim Robbins, Sean Penn, or Susan Sarandon.

From their inception, Artists United to Win Without War and Musicians United to Win Without War (heretofore referred to as Artists/Musicians United when being discussed collectively) were organizations expressly comprised of individuals possessing various degrees of celebrity; this is unlike Not in Our Name, which always also had a

²⁵² This is reflected in the Gallup poll referenced earlier, which asked whether “the United States made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, or not,” for November 8-11, 2001 only 9% of those polled believed it was a mistake, with 89% saying that it was not. However, by February 6-9, 2014, 49% believed that it was a mistake and 48% believed that it was not, reflecting a general shift in public opinion on Afghanistan. In another Gallup poll which asked people which group they felt was winning the war against terrorism (the US and its allies, neither side, or the terrorists), the highest percentage of those polled believed the US and its allies were winning December 6-9, 2001 (64%), January 7-9, 2002 (66%), and April 22-23, 2003 (65%). The first and last polling dates (October 11-14, 2001 and August 11-14, 2011) were identical, with 42% of those polled believing the US and its allies were winning. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5257/war-terrorism.aspx>.

²⁵³ There were also a handful of celebrities that ‘joined’ multiple anti-war organizations.

wide-ranging general citizen membership.²⁵⁴ Formed in conjunction with MoveOn.org, a left-leaning organization, Artists/Musicians United's membership ranks were filled with a host of celebrities, some of whose names were also associated with Not in Our Name. However, Artists/Musicians United also attracted a greater number of "A-List" celebrities, unlike Not in Our Name.²⁵⁵ This attraction—particularly for Artists United, as it had less exclusive unofficial membership criteria than Musicians United (obviously to be a member of Musicians United required one to at the very least be involved in music production)—was more than likely because of the more mainstream political orientation of both organizations due to their affiliation with MoveOn.org. Although MoveOn.org was in its nascent stages at this time, it had only been created in 1998 and was not necessarily then part of the political establishment to the degree that it has become since, it was still more socially and politically acceptable for celebrities than the alternative political grounding of Refuse and Resist.

Refuse and Resist, the 'parent' organization of Not in Our Name, had (buried) ties to the Revolutionary Communist Party USA (RCP), as well as to other non-mainstream organizations, making it potentially less appealing to celebrities, regardless of the fact

²⁵⁴ Artists United to Win Without War is (inconsistently) also written as Artists for Winning Without War—even on MoveOn.org's own website. A *New York Times* article on comedian/actress Janeane Garofalo attributes the creation of Artists United to filmmaker Robert Greenwald, while he is only listed on the Moveon.org petition as a co-chair of the organization alongside Mike Farrell. Paula Span, "And Don't Even Get Her Started on the War," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/27/arts/27span.html?module=>.

²⁵⁵ Both organizations are listed as Win Without War coalition members. While both Artists United and Musicians United were linked to MoveOn.org, and seemed to fall off the radar within a year of their creation, Win Without War continues to exist as a contemporary project of the Center for International Policy—which came to being as a result of the Vietnam War—and continues to be active as of the writing of this dissertation.

that Not in Our Name stood as its own, ideologically independent organization.²⁵⁶ The importance of this potential lack of appeal was especially significant considering the public backlash against some of the celebrities who took an anti-war stance in the post-9/11 period, making it more prudent image and career-wise for celebrities to align themselves with a more mainstream political organization, although by no means making them immune from such criticism. Artists/Musicians United thus had such widely recognizable names such as Gillian Anderson, Sheryl Crow, Matt Damon, Peter Gabriel, Anjelica Huston, Outkast, Martin Sheen, and Russell Simmons attached to their rosters. And, Artists United also attracted participation from ‘veteran’ celebrity protestors, such as Mike Farrell and Ed Asner, who had been associated with the Vietnam war protests of the 1960s and 70s as well as the anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-Reagan celebrity political activity in the 1980s, suggesting clear lines of connection between the politics of these earlier organizations and movements and the liberal democratic politics of the post-9/11 anti-war organizations.

Neither Artists nor Musicians United had non-celebrity (or at the very least, non-public figure) members. Rather, both organizations served as a means to make the (generally non-existent popular) anti-war movement visible to ordinary citizens and, more specifically, to encourage these citizens to sign MoveOn.org’s “Win Without War” and “Let the Inspections Work” petitions.²⁵⁷ While still technically participating in political acts, celebrities served strictly more of a strategic purpose in their involvement in Artists/Musicians United than they did in Not in Our Name. While Not In Our Name

²⁵⁶ MoveOn formed its Political Action Committee in early 2004.

²⁵⁷ <http://civic.moveon.org/artistswinwithoutwar//> and <http://civic.moveon.org/musicianswinwithoutwar//>.

also used their celebrity members for strategic ends, which as the previous chapter illustrates, had historically been the case for celebrity members in already existing political groups, there was also active celebrity involvement in a variety of organization-sponsored events. Whether or not it was actually the case, the wide variety and range of celebrity involvement in Not in Our Name ended up serving to position celebrity members as individual political subjects, reinvesting them with a visible agency that did not clearly exist in the same way for celebrity members of Artists/Musicians United. Few public appearances notwithstanding, including a march to “deliver” the signed positions to President Bush/congress—the coverage of which focused on the celebrities participating as much as the anti-war agenda of the event—neither Artists nor Musicians United (as organizations) had very active of an existence outside the realm of the Internet.²⁵⁸

As with many other non-celebrity anti-war organizations, one of the main goals for Not in Our Name, Musicians United, and Artists United was clearly consciousness raising of a sort, to use a term popularized by feminists in the 1960s. Specifically, they were working to make the general public aware of a political position, or counter narrative, of the Iraq War/War on Terror, particularly in juxtaposition with the one that was widely articulated by the mainstream news media. As with the first Gulf War, the Iraq War, and the War on Terror more generally, was largely defined and understood through the mainstream news media. However, unlike the first Gulf War, whose tone was set by CNN, according to Jim Rutenberg of the *New York Times*, Fox News set the

²⁵⁸ This is not to say that the Internet was not an important tool for Not in Our Name, rather that the organization had an active life outside of it.

tone for the War on Terror, which revolved around efforts to “skewer the mainstream media, disparage the French and flay anybody else who questions President Bush’s war effort.”²⁵⁹ Fox News and the Bush administration were both blamed for the pro-war coverage disseminated by mainstream news outlets. CNN founder Ted Turner spoke to this bias, blaming it on Rupert Murdoch and Fox News.²⁶⁰ This same blame was issued when CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour was asked about censorship and the Iraq War. Although she did admit that CNN “muzzled itself,” choosing to engage in self-censorship, she did suggest that they were “‘intimidated’ by the Bush administration and Fox News.”²⁶¹

The mainstream, dominant-hegemonic war narrative, which the celebrity anti-war organizations were attempting to counter, has proven to have been incredibly misleading. For example, an early study based on polling conducted by the Program on International Policy (PIPA) at the University of Maryland and Knowledge Networks from January to September of 2003, found that a majority of Americans had misperceptions of the war in Iraq according to their primary source of news.²⁶² According to a summary of the report:

An in-depth analysis of a series of polls conducted June through September found 48% incorrectly believed that evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda have been found, 22% that weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq, and 25% that world public opinion favored the

²⁵⁹ Jim Rutenberg, “Cable’s War Coverage Suggests a New ‘Fox Effect’ on Television,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/16/international/worldspecial/16FOX.html?scp=2&sq=4/16/2003%20CNN&st=cse>.

²⁶⁰ Patrick Martin, “Media bosses admit pro-war bias in coverage of Iraq,” *World Socialist Website*, May 2, 2003. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/med-m02.shtml>.

²⁶¹ Peter Johnson, “Amanpour: CNN practiced self-censorship,” September 14, 2003, http://www.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2003-09-14-media-mix_x.htm.

²⁶² “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” October 2, 2003, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/102.php.

US going to war with Iraq. Overall 60% had at least one of these three misperceptions.²⁶³

They also found that Americans' misperceptions varied significantly depending on their source of news—with a greater likelihood of one or more misperceptions being held if they obtained their news from CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News than from print journalism, NPR, or PBS.²⁶⁴ Similarly, a study conducted by scholars at the University of Massachusetts Amherst after the first Gulf War found that the more television news individuals watched, the less they actually knew about the war and the Middle East in general.²⁶⁵ Simultaneously, much of the criticism of the recent coverage of the War on Terror by network and cable news was that they relied too heavily on U.S. government officials and members of the military for “expert opinions” pertaining to the war.

While celebrity members of the anti-war organizations attempted to counter the misleading narrative of mainstream news through television appearances of their own, and as celebrities their activities were covered by mainstream television news media, most of their efforts were focused on the broader reach of the Internet and, to a lesser degree, traditional print media. While the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are the first American ground wars to occur after the Internet gained widespread popularity, expanding the potential field of information dissemination, the anti-war organizations under consideration tended to use the Internet in much the same way as they would

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ It should be noted that PBS and NPR are not the most popular choices for news.

²⁶⁵ Thomas Gardner, “War as Mediated Narrative: The Sextet of War Rhetoric,” in *Constructing America's War Culture: Iraq, Media, and Images at Home*, eds. Thomas Conroy and Jarice Hanson, 113

traditional print media.²⁶⁶ All three organizations thus participated in the creation of statements, pledges, petitions, and other such documents to be posted across the Internet and as paid for advertisements in international print publications in order to clarify, disseminate, and otherwise bolster their anti-war positions to a broader public.

Not in Our Name produced two primary documents over the course of its existence: a “Pledge of Resistance” and a “Statement of Conscience.” The free-verse “Pledge of Resistance,” the only one of the two documents to be attributed to specific authors instead of a committee, was written by hip-hop performer and actor Saul Williams and eco-feminist theorist Starhawk. The pledge begins with a call for justice:

We believe that as people living
in the United States it is our
responsibility to resist the injustices
done by our government, in our names...²⁶⁷

The pledge opposes the actions of the then current manifestation of the US Government, which it sees guilty of eroding “the very freedoms / you have claimed to fight for,” couching the erosion of said freedoms within issues of economics, stating that:

Not in our name
will you wage endless war
there can be no more deaths
no more transfusions of blood for oil²⁶⁸

Claiming “alliance with those / who have come under attack,” whether for opposition to the war or for religious or ethnic reasons, the pledge ends by promising: “to

²⁶⁶ This approach to the Internet as a digital repository of what would have traditionally appeared in print is something that changes over the first decade of the 21st century, particularly with the increased use of social media.

²⁶⁷ Starhawk and Saul Williams, “Pledge of Resistance,” <http://www.starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/notinourname.html>.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

make common cause / with the people of the world / to bring about justice freedom and peace.”²⁶⁹ While the text of the “Pledge of Resistance” clearly elucidates the anti-war position of Not in Our Name (as well as perhaps the more artistic pursuits of the organization’s members), it is unclear as to what the actual purpose of the pledge was. While the pledge can still be found in its entirety on Starhawk’s website and a smattering of other anti-war websites, it never once made an appearance on Not in Our Name’s website—only coming up in passing reference to the 2003 “Not in My Name” EP released by Williams on Synchronic records (a label independent of the organization itself).²⁷⁰ In fact, Williams’ video for the song version that he recorded of the pledge had—and continues to have—a wider reach than the actual pledge itself, particularly on the Internet. This was, however, not the case for the “Statement of Conscience,” which, as Not in Our Name’s primary anti-war mission statement, they attempted to spread as broadly as possible.

Not in Our Name’s “Statement of Conscience,” created in the spring of 2002, is the more developed and concrete articulation of the organization’s position(s) regarding the War on Terror.²⁷¹ Written as a more straightforward narrative address than the

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ I actually own this in digital format but did not realize it had any connection to a larger organization/movement until I began this research—Williams’ work typically contains socio-political commentary and so there was nothing that stood out about the content of this particular release over others.

²⁷¹ They revised the statement in January 2005 after Bush’s reelection, but never paid to have it reprinted. The revised statement was re-titled “A Statement of Conscience Against War and Repression,” and although Not in Our Name claimed that over 15,000 people had signed the statement by Bush’s second inauguration in 2005, the names attached to the revised statement had largely lost their star quality (of the original listed signatories, mainly the public intellectuals like Noam Chomsky and Cornel West remained). A copy of the revised statement can be found (buried) on the Not in Our Name website: <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news15/news703.html> or on the Revolutionary Communist Party USA’s website: <http://revcom.us/a/007/statement-of-conscience.htm>. Although not actively publicized, Not in Our Name’s parent organization, Refuse and Resist, was founded in part by members of the RCP.

pledge, the “Statement of Conscience” connects the events of September 11th with “similar scenes in Baghdad, Panama City, and, a generation ago, Vietnam...” in an attempt to do away with the notion of American exceptionalism, even in tragedy.²⁷² Echoing and elaborating on many of the same themes as the “Pledge of Resistance,” and familiar liberal democratic political tropes more generally, the statement is critical of the Bush administration (while also calling out Congress), not only in the way that it “arrogated to itself and its allies the right to rain down military force anywhere and anytime” abroad, but also in the way that it curtailed civil liberties domestically, creating “a pall of repression over society.”²⁷³ And, like the pledge, the statement speaks of standing in solidarity with other individuals around the world—they identify, for example, “Israeli reservists who, at great personal risk...refuse to serve in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza...” as a source of inspiration for domestic protest.²⁷⁴

Although Not in Our Name outwardly criticized the Bush administration and Congress and speaks against the culturally engrained idea of American exceptionalism in their official published documents, such criticism should not be read as outright rejection of the state. While Refuse and Resist, Not in Our Name’s parent organization, might have had links to the RCP, USA, the ideological and political grounding of the RCP did not seem to trickle down to inform the politics of the anti-war organization in any sort of concrete way; instead, Not in Our Name espoused a liberal democratic politics which made them more similar to other anti-war celebrity organizations, radical language aside.

²⁷² “Statement of Conscience,” <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news4/news170.html>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Not in Our Name—and especially its more vocal celebrity members—embraced their role as liberal democratic US citizens and sought to work with and within the existing system, either by suggesting that the course of the Bush administration was changeable or in attempts to bracket off the actions of the administration from other government representatives or the ‘true’ America. This is evident not only in both the statement and pledge, but also in the types of news stories about affiliated celebrities—or “artists” and those in “arts and letters,” as Not in Our Name labeled such individuals—catalogued on the organization’s website.

A reprint on the Not in Our Name website of a statement made by actor Sean Penn at a Baghdad news conference, illustrated this: “I am a citizen of the United States of America. I believe in the Constitution of the United States, and the American people. Ours is a government designed to function ‘of’-‘by’-and-‘for’ the people. I am one of those people...”²⁷⁵ Donald Sutherland, another member of Not in Our Name, also distinguished between what the US fundamentally *is* in contradistinction to the then-current conditions in an interview he gave while in attendance at the 2002 Berlin Film Festival. Referred to by the article’s author as “politically clued-up,” Sutherland is quoted as claiming that: “What the nation’s built on is discussion, contradiction and growth, and at the moment you can’t discuss anything. If you do start to discuss it, you get criticized.”²⁷⁶ And by “it” Sutherland was referring to the dominant-hegemonic narrative of the impending War in Iraq, which centered around the oppressive regime of

²⁷⁵ Sean Penn, “Baghdad News Conference” (statement, Iraq, December 15, 2002), The Artists Network of Refuse and Resist, <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news6/news271.html>.

²⁷⁶ Stephen Applebaum, “Hollywood Is On The Offensive,” *The Scotsman*, March 7, 2002, <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news3/news137.html>.

Saddam Hussein, his connection to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the threat of Iraqi WMD.

Not in Our Name paid to have the Statement of Conscience published as a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on September 19, 2002, the *Los Angeles Times* on October 4, 2002, and in *USA Today* on October 18, 2002—a move clearly enabled by the material conditions of their celebrity—while *The Guardian* printed it as a commentary piece in the World News/United States section on June 14, 2002 under the headline “We won’t deny our consciences: Prominent Americans have issued this statement on the war on terror.”²⁷⁷ All of the printings of the statement, including the one in *The Guardian*, featured a list of the statement’s signatories, most of whom were celebrities or public figures of some sort. However the signatories attached to the printing in *The Guardian* had fewer celebrity names (in terms of actors or musicians) than did subsequent printings or than continue to be featured on Not in Our Name’s website, again marking the importance of the activities surrounding the lead-up to the Iraq invasion on the number of celebrities deciding to become publicly active in the anti-war movement.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ “We won’t deny our consciences,” *The Guardian*, June 14, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jun/14/usa.internationaleducationnews1>. It is unclear as to whether or not the printing in *The Guardian* was paid for—however, it is not listed on Not in Our Name’s website as one of publications in which a paid-for advertisement was placed. According to the Not in Our Name website, the statement was published in over 45 newspapers and journals domestically and internationally—they do not provide a list. <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news8/news353.html>.

²⁷⁸ *The Guardian* printed the statement in June—Saddam Hussein rejected UN weapons inspections proposals in July, with no forward movement between Hussein and the UN regarding the possibility for inspections in August, and it wasn’t until September that President Bush addressed the UN concerning the dangerous potential of Iraq, essentially promising US and allied action if there was continued UN inaction.

Not in Our Name emphasized the support of celebrities, even if merely as signers of the Statement of Conscience—which is as far as some celebrities went in their participation with this particular organization—and they drew on this as a means to organize anti-war protests and attract people to attend their various events. Advertising celebrity participation not only as a means of eliciting the interest of non-celebrity citizens in the anti-war cause, Not in Our Name also used celebrities to convince these same citizens that the organization itself was worthy of their time and efforts as well. Unlike either Artists or Musicians United, whose actual ‘membership’ was only open to celebrities (whether either organization actually had members, as opposed to just having celebrities associated with the cause, is hard to discern), Not in Our Name always had a membership also comprised of average citizens—suggesting more of a belief in an ‘equality’ in political participation between celebrity and ordinary citizen. While Not in Our Name had regional chapters populated by non-celebrity citizen-members and hosted events that featured the work of non-celebrity artists, the organization attempted to find an equilibrium between artists with larger-name recognition and those without; however, like other, more mainstream organizations (and the media whose attention Not in Our Name was attempting to draw), more focus was on the events with celebrity involvement than those without.

The MoveOn.org petitions to which Artists and Musicians United were linked had a very different feel and obvious function from either of the organizational texts created by Not in Our Name. The petition that was supported by Artists United, “Win Without War,” and that supported by Musicians United, “Let the Inspections Work,” lacked both

the creative/narrative flow and the passionate language of the documents produced by Not in Our Name.²⁷⁹ The MoveOn.org webpage housing the petition letter of Artists United pleads with the visitor, explaining to her that “**Artists Say Win Without War**...Please join major actors, writers and public figures in telling the Bush Administration that we can **Win Without War**.”²⁸⁰ The petition letter itself, addressed to President Bush with the subject heading “Artists Say Win Without War,” was modeled after the Win Without War mission statement at the time, and had over 100 celebrity signatures attached to it. Differences between the texts of Not in Our Name and those of Artists and Musicians United suggest a distinction in the type of publics that the anti-war organizations were trying to construct or draw together—specifically the desire of Artists/Musicians United to attract centrist and more politically mainstream individuals.

The language of the petition takes great pains to establish signatories (celebrity and otherwise) as “patriotic Americans” concerned that “a pre-emptive military invasion of Iraq will harm national interests...and undermine our moral standing in the world.”²⁸¹ Unlike either document produced by Not in Our Name, the “Win Without War” petition did not take any sort of critical stance against the US government in general and, instead, repeatedly makes clear that they are interested in fixing the broken elements of the existing system. In fact, the petition pledged support for UN weapons inspections and the

²⁷⁹ Embarrassingly enough, the extant version of the petition available via multiple Internet sources, including MoveOn.org’s own website, misspells the word petition—offering up a “petiton letter” instead. <http://civic.moveon.org/artistswinwithoutwar/>.

²⁸⁰ “Win Without War” Petition Letter, <http://civic.moveon.org/artistswinwithoutwar/>. MoveOn.org promised that a “compiled petition with your individual comment will be presented to President Bush and members of his Administration at appropriate times in the policy making process.”

²⁸¹ Ibid. Clearly Artists United reinforces rather than rejects American exceptionalism, unlike Not in Our Name’s Statement.

“valid U.S. and UN objective of disarming Saddam Hussein” are continuously reinforced, as the celebrity signatories “share in the belief that Saddam Hussein cannot be allowed to possess weapons of mass destruction.”²⁸² While support is shown for the US as a system, the “Win Without War” petition marks the proposed tactics and policies of the Bush Administration as the malfunction in the system in need of repair, stating that: “We reject the doctrine—a reversal of long-held American tradition—that our country, alone, has the right to launch first-strike attacks.”²⁸³ Again, by taking issue with the doctrine as antithetical to tradition, this specifically speaks to the problem and is not a critique of the system as a whole. Artists United is not taking a unilateral position of pacifism, as the closing line of the petition reads as follows: “Let us instead devote our resources to improving the security and well-being of people here at home and around the world.” By closing the petition in this way suggests that it was only this particular war (a manifestation of the policies of the Bush administration) that they did not support and not the long history of American militarism in general, perhaps unlike Not in Our Name.²⁸⁴

Artists United, like Not in Our Name, utilized the tactic of publicity and took out a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on December 10, 2002; the organization also took advantage of the publicness of their celebrity members and held a corresponding press event in Los Angeles, at which such actors as Anjelica Houston, Martin Sheen, and Tony Shalhoub were in attendance.²⁸⁵ At one of the publicity events surrounding the “Win Without War” petition letter to be delivered to President Bush,

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ “Win Without War”

²⁸⁵ David Cortright, “The Peaceful Superpower: The movement against War in Iraq,” in *Charting Transnational Democracy: Beyond Global Arrogance*, eds. Janie Leatherman and Julie A. Vebber, 92.

long-standing celebrity political activist Mike Farrell claimed that one of the primary purposes of Artists United, and “the Hollywood community...speaking out” about the proposed invasion of Iraq was “to show average citizens that it is OK to voice dissent.”²⁸⁶ While this might seem to be echoing a similar sentiment to that voiced by celebrities in the 60s and 70s—dissent as a civil right in a democracy—Farrell, perhaps unintentionally, marks a subtle shift in celebrity politics.

Artists United positioned celebrity as different or apart from the general citizen masses. Whereas Charlton Heston claimed that, “...public personalities have private rights. They cannot abdicate their public personality...We approach this issue of civil rights as private citizens...We are aware of our rights as private citizens,” when asked why celebrities were taking part alongside average citizens in the March on Washington, Farrell highlighted only the publicness of celebrity citizenship.²⁸⁷ This contemporary focus on the public citizen over Heston’s historical focus on the private citizen places the Hollywood community as distinct from the general social body, with celebrities as seemingly more politically enlightened than the average citizen subject and thus needed to lead these other citizens towards a correct politics. Such political ‘enlightenment’ however is not necessarily related to any privileged or specialized knowledge but rather is a product of occupying the status of celebrity, wherein the figure of the celebrity has come to be understood as being in a different political space from ordinary citizens. While celebrity citizenship seems to have different political rights than ordinary

²⁸⁶ “Celebrities Endorse Letter Asking Bush to Stop War Rhetoric,” *Associated Press*, December 10, 2002, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines02/1210-09.htm>.

²⁸⁷ Murray Schumach, “Hollywood Cause: Movie Delegation Set to Join Racial March No Fanfare Citizen’s Right Shadow From the Past,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1963.

citizenship, this difference has to do with the constant media attention given to celebrities; if the media constantly looks to celebrities for their political opinions, celebrity voices become louder by default. Rather obviously, in a cluttered political landscape this media attention can make celebrity engagement in political causes desirous for other political actors, potentially affording celebrities access to channels of power as a means of (re)focusing media attention.

Media coverage of all of the celebrity anti-war organizations highlighted celebrities as leading the way for ordinary citizen participation in the anti-war movement. An October 2002 *USA Today* article covering a Not in Our Name-sponsored anti-Iraq War rally in New York City framed the wider celebrity participation in the anti-war movement as such: “Barbara Streisand isn’t the only celebrity banging the drums of peace...Hollywood, which banded together after Sept. 11 to raise funds, flags and patriotic fervor, is mobilizing an anti-war front” and suggested that the initial slow growth of a US peace movement was because “U.S. celebs fear being labeled anti-American.”²⁸⁸ The article thus links the growth of US anti-war activism with celebrity activism, suggesting a relationship between celebrity involvement, issue awareness or dialogue (via the public sphere), and average citizen’s political activism. This shift in the role of celebrity can best be summarized as the difference between political praxis alongside or as of a result of already existing wider citizen movements versus the necessity for modeling such praxis—the celebrity as an agent of politicization. In these

²⁸⁸ Caesar G. Soriano, “Celebrities Mobilize for Peace,” *USA TODAY*, October 7, 2002, <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/news6/news267.html>. The article quotes a publicist and “damage control expert” as saying that “I would advise my clients to stay away from the topic.”

articulations of the relationship of celebrity to average citizen subjects the potential political power of celebrity, as public individuals with an always-available existing platform for speech, is clearly acknowledged. Specifically they acknowledge the liberal democratic inclination to redistribute down; political power is understood as ‘shareable’ between those who have said power (celebrity) and those who do not (average citizens) and, in order for effective political action to occur, *must* be shared. While difficult to actualize, because it is practically impossible to bracket off celebrity in real life while simultaneously difficult for ordinary citizens to participate in the power of celebrity, this is what guides the language of solidarity and equality (such as “standing side by side” or “common cause”) that runs throughout the pledges, petitions, statements and assorted texts produced by all of the celebrity anti-war organizations or the (perhaps subconscious) impetus for calling an organization ‘Not in *Our* Name.’

Musicians United to Win Without War, referred to by *Rolling Stone* as an “industry-wide peace alliance,” for which Artists United was a “film-industry analog,” released a statement of purpose on their own website (also hosted, not surprisingly, by MoveOn.org).²⁸⁹ While there is a link to another MoveOn.org petition letter on the Musicians United website, this time entitled “Let the Inspections Work,” it is very small—this is the opposite of the Artists United website where the petition letter *is* the website. Unlike the fairly uncritical prose of the MoveOn.org petition to which Artists United’s name is attached, and which is the only textual representation of the

²⁸⁹ Augustin K. Sedgewick, “Simmons Unites Anti-War Stars: Lou Reed, Jay-Z, Dave, Missy, others join alliance,” *Rolling Stone*, February 28, 2003, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/simmons-unites-anti-war-stars-20030228>.

organization, Musicians United's statement found fault with the Bush administration for causing "the voices of reason and debate" to "have been trampled and ignored" in their rush to war.²⁹⁰ Claiming to "believe in discussion without jargon" (however perhaps not discussion without cliché), Musicians United charged "that weapons of mass destruction, regime change and other administration catch phrases are doublespeak, in the words of George Orwell."²⁹¹ While the petition letter, addressed specifically to Bush and Kofi Annan, that is accessible from Musician United's statement webpage speaks in the language of peace and diplomacy as reasons against invading Iraq (and is not dissimilar to the one sponsored by Artists United), the actual statement takes a different, perhaps slightly less diplomatic, tone, suggesting that "this planned invasion might be playing right into the hands of Al Qaeda and others, who will use it as an excuse to rally anti-American and anti-Western sentiment despite no great love for Saddam on their parts."²⁹²

Musicians United makes an effort to highlight the difference in their members, countering the equation of anti-war with far left politics by a wide-swath of the media and the political establishment. According to the same Musicians United statement,

Most of us have never met one another - so it is difficult to presume that all of us agree on and believe in the same things - I'm sure our individual feelings are wide ranging on this subject and a host of others...but remarkably it seems that we all realize that we at least agree on this one basic tenet, that a war right now is premature and unnecessary.²⁹³

And according to Russell Simmons, who *Billboard* described as "one of the key recruiters" for Musicians United, "the group transcends political affiliations: 'This is an

²⁹⁰ <http://civic.moveon.org/musiciansunited//>

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

organization operating from love and compassion. All we're saying is there are peaceful alternatives to war."²⁹⁴ Neither Musicians United's sister organization, Artists United, nor Not in Our Name addresses the issue of political affiliation (or the ideological grounding in general) of its celebrity members. More than likely, this absence is related to target audience.

Musicians United seemed to be primarily targeting a younger audience than either Artists United or, to a slightly lesser degree, Not in Our Name, both of whose celebrity rosters were predominantly stacked with names that would resonate with a (relatively) older public.²⁹⁵ A younger public might not be as set in their political affiliations as would an older one, and thus the necessity to appeal on the basis of both the universality of the issue (in terms of its significance for any person concerned with issues of freedom, equality, and justice—which they assume are *all* peoples) and the issue itself.²⁹⁶ In many ways Musicians United can be understood as functioning like Rock the Vote, in terms of using celebrities with a greater youth-oriented cultural cachet to advocate to a younger public. However, unlike Rock the Vote, one of primary vehicles for reaching a younger public as a cohesive whole was closed off to Musicians United: according to Russell Simmons and Mos Def, two of the organization's primary spokespeople, MTV in the US was unwilling to show the antiwar public service commercials that the organization

²⁹⁴ Carla Hay, "Acts Line Up On Both Sides Of War Debate," *Billboard*, March 22, 2003, 1.

²⁹⁵ While a younger public might recognize Danny Glover or Jessica Lange, they probably wouldn't carry the sway that Jay-Z might.

²⁹⁶ The effectiveness of this tactic is another issue altogether. According to an article in *The Christian Science Monitor*, younger Americans were more likely than their older counterparts to support military intervention in Iraq by a 3-to-1 margin. Ann Scott Tyson, "Antiwar views split along generation gap," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 2002, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/1106/p01s01-ussc.html>.

created.²⁹⁷ According to an “MTV spokeswoman, who insisted on anonymity.... ‘MTV does not accept advocacy ads.’”²⁹⁸ Such a claim is almost laughable considering that Rock the Vote is referred to as a “voting advocacy group” by media outlets and discusses the way in which members of the organization “advocate for an electoral process” on its own website, yet Rock the Vote continues to not only be able to run advertisements on MTV but has had a longstanding partnership with the network through the “Choose or Lose” voter bus and campaign.²⁹⁹ This is not to say that Musicians United did not find platforms for their advertisements—Musicians United’s anti-war advertisement appeared in both *Rolling Stone* and the *New York Times* (members of Musicians United hosted a New York-based press event for the latter, not unlike the one Artists United held in Los Angeles). However neither of these publications had the reach with a younger demographic that a televised commercial on a network such as MTV would have had. While MTV was unwilling to run Musicians United’s advertisements, they did not refrain from airing “frequent stories” about the organization (or, to a lesser degree, about Artists United), due to the network’s celebrity and entertainment-focus.³⁰⁰ Musicians United also received exposure from coverage in trade publications. For example, an article

²⁹⁷ Neil Strauss, “MTV Is Wary Of Videos On War,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/26/arts/the-pop-life-mtv-is-wary-of-videos-on-war.html>.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. MTV Europe went a step further during the Iraq war, distributing a memo a day after the war began recommending that music videos “depicting ‘war, soldiers, war planes, bombs, missiles, riots and social unrest, executions’ and ‘other obviously sensitive material’” be taken out of rotation “until further notice.” Besides videos with obvious war imagery, the memo also advised against showing anything with lyrics, song titles, or band names that evoked bombs, war, or “other sensitive words.” This included anything by the B-52s.

²⁹⁹ See Daniel Barna, “These Celebrities Asked You to Vote But Didn’t Vote Themselves,” November 3, 2014, <http://www.refinery29.com/2014/11/77284/celebrity-rock-the-vote-psa-controversy>; “About Rock The Vote,” <http://www.rockthevote.com/about-us/>; “Choose or Lose: Vote Smart,” <http://www.mtv.com/chooseorlose/partners/votesmart/>.

³⁰⁰ Cortright, “The Peaceful Superpower,” 92.

entitled “Musicians Band Together Against War Threat” which appeared in the February 27, 2003 issue of *Billboard* listed the 59 members of Musicians united, and mentioned not only the advertisements the organization took out in the *New York Times* but also their website and the petition hosted by MoveOn.org (both of the latter appear as hyperlinks on the web version of the *Billboard* article).³⁰¹

While Musicians United read as more politically progressive than Artists United, it is important to remember that both were Win Without War/MoveOn.org organizations and that neither was really *that* progressive. However, Musicians United drew on the widely-accepted notion that musicians are more rebellious and therefore less concerned with public perception than other types of celebrities—which is particularly the accepted truth about rock, punk, alternative, and hip-hop performers. Transitioning from folk music as the popular genre for the expression of protest, which developed around the social movements of the 1960s, currently “a song with a political message is more likely to reach a broad public if that message is slipped into a rhythm-and-blues or hip hop song, eased along by a groove or blurted out over headbanging metal chords.”³⁰²

According to Russell Simmons, “I don’t believe that there’s any media that’s controlling hip-hop...You throw a rap record out the window, no George Bush, nobody, can stop it if it’s a hit. We don’t need anybody, we never needed anybody to get our message out.”³⁰³ However, such behavioral and ideological latitude is not extended to performers of other

³⁰¹ “Musicians Band Together Against War Threat,” *Billboard*, February 27, 2003, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/72172/musicians-band-together-against-war-threat>.

³⁰² Jon Pareles, “New Songs, Old Message: ‘No War’,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/09/arts/music-new-songs-old-message-no-war.html?pagewanted=1>.

³⁰³ Ibid.

popular music genres, especially country. The most obvious and best-known example of this would be Natalie Maines from the country music trio The Dixie Chicks.

At a 2003 performance in London, 9 days prior to the invasion of Iraq, Maines voiced the Dixie Chicks' opposition to the impending war, stating that: "...we're on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence, and we're ashamed that the president of the United States is from Texas."³⁰⁴ While musicians from the aforementioned genres had more latitude in terms of what was publicly acceptable (and *accepted*) speech—hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe, Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello, Ani DiFranco, and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, for example, were all very vocal in condemning the Bush administration and the war in Iraq—the Dixie Chicks were met with an almost immediate public backlash (labeled as "unpatriotic") and members of the country music community, the media, and right-wing political figures called for boycotts of the band.³⁰⁵ In 2006 *Time* magazine put the Dixie Chicks on the cover dressed all in black with the headline: "Radical Chicks," and wondered "Is America Ready?"³⁰⁶ This is not to say that country musicians (and fans) actually are unilaterally more conservative (and therefore more patriotic by default)

³⁰⁴ Greg Mitchell, "Ten Years Ago Today a Dixie Chick Dared to Hit Bush on War—and a Hate Campaign Began," *The Nation*, March 10, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/blog/173271/ten-years-ago-today-dixie-chick-dared-hit-bush-war-and-hate-campaign-began>.

³⁰⁵ While the boycott consisted of many country stations in US refusing to play the Dixie Chicks' music (causing their single "Landslide" to go from #10 on the Billboard charts to #44 in one week) and some fans no longer buying albums or concert tickets, a radio station in Kansas City, Missouri "held a Dixie 'chicken toss' party Friday morning, where Chick critics were encouraged to dump the group's tapes, CDs and concert tickets into trash cans." "Dixie Chicks pulled from air after bashing Bush," *CNN*, March 14, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/SHOWBIZ/Music/03/14/dixie.chicks.reut/>; and "Destroying The Dixie Chicks—Ten Years After," <http://www.savingcountrymusic.com/destroying-the-dixie-chicks-ten-years-after>. See also Kia Makarechi, "Natalie Maines On George Bush Slam: 'I Was Right From The Beginning'," *The Huffington Post*, April 26, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/26/natalie-maines-george-bush-dixie-chicks_n_3163296.html.

³⁰⁶ <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20060529,00.html>.

rather the cultural assumption is that they are or should be. An article that appeared in *Billboard* magazine addressing both sides of the war debate juxtaposed the staunch nationalism of country performers such as Darryl Worley and Clint Black with the anti-war position of the members of Musicians United, attributing the difference to nurturing—according to Worley, he, along with other country performers and fans, were very patriotic because that is how they “were raised.”³⁰⁷ This assumption, and claims such as Worley’s, forced many country performers to carefully measure their political speech and affiliations in order to protect their careers—a country performer might be privately against the war in Iraq, for example, but they would not choose to publicly share this position. This genre-based difference in expectation explains the reaction to Maines’ comments at the London concert—which were fairly tame in the grand scheme of things—as well as the paucity of members of Musicians United from genres other than rock, punk, alternative or hip-hop.³⁰⁸

The inclusion of celebrity members helped expand the reach of all three anti-war organizations; as others have argued, a “famous face or well-known personality can help to overcome media disinterest and draw attention to the challengers’ message.”³⁰⁹ Celebrity was especially important for drawing the attention of news media—which connected the organizations to potentially politically sympathetic individuals. Even though all of the organizations relied heavily on the Internet as a method of communication, these organizations began before the widespread use of social media as

³⁰⁷ Hay, “Acts Line Up On Both Sides of War Debate,” 90.

³⁰⁸ Lucinda Williams and Rosanne Cash are the only two country performers on Musicians United’s roster, both of whom can be classified as cross-over musicians. Obviously this is not to say that there aren’t left-leaning country performers.

³⁰⁹ Cortright, “The Peaceful Superpower,” 92.

means of information sharing and so televisual and print media were still necessary to direct individuals to any given cause.³¹⁰ While all three anti-war organizations clearly received mainstream news coverage aided by their celebrity membership, such coverage was limited in comparison to media coverage that supported the War on Terror (both tacitly and implicitly).

In much the same way as coverage of Seth Rogen's appearance before the Senate centered on the personalities involved, what media coverage of the anti-war organizations that did occur often focused more on the celebrities as individuals (and their relationship not specifically to the anti-war movement but as political agents generally) over a focus on the organization. As David Cortright points out, news media "commentators criticized artists for exploiting their celebrity to speak out on a complicated matter of national security" and rather than being allowed to spread the organization's message, "artists would often have to spend time defending their right to speak as citizens."³¹¹ Artists United, however, saw this type of backlash as one way to gauge the organization's success. In a letter from Mike Farrell and Robert Greenwald on behalf of Artists United to members of the MoveOn.org Media Corps, a group of volunteers ready to "mobilize to push the media to fairly cover this war," they say as much, writing: "it's clear that one measure of our success is the level of ferocity of the vicious personal and professional

³¹⁰ MySpace, the first big social media site, was launched in July of 2003. While MySpace witnessed an explosion in users from 2006-2008 (jumping from 2-80 million), within the US it was geared towards a younger demographic than the wider-appealing Facebook, launching for the general public in 2006, and Twitter, also launched in 2006. See "The History of Social Networking," August 5, 2014, <http://www.digitaltrends.com/features/the-history-of-social-networking/>.

³¹¹ Cortright, "The Peaceful Superpower," 92-93.

attacks that have been launched at our members.”³¹² In the same letter they also acknowledge the criticism from politicians and members of the media that celebrities were not equipped to speak on issues of national security and foreign affairs. However, Farrell and Greenwald place the blame for celebrities having to fill this role on politicians and the media, claiming that Artists United was begun because:

...we believed it was important for public figures and entertainers to speak out—especially at a time when there are almost no consistent voices of opposition that get media attention. We would have preferred that the media cover and interview experts and others who have spent their lives studying these issues, but since that didn't have media appeal, we stepped in.³¹³

Other attempts to limit the anti-war message of celebrities and celebrity organizations were made that went beyond such criticism, including censorship and behaviors not dissimilar to that which occurred during the blacklisting Hollywood experienced in the 1950s. According to a 2003 article in *The New York Times* “There were reports—quickly denied by both CBS and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, the Grammy organization—that musicians had been told not to make antiwar statements during the ceremonies.”³¹⁴ At the Oscar ceremony that same year organizers canceled the part of the celebrity red carpet arrivals open to the public,

³¹² “Join the MoveOn Media Corps,” <http://civic.moveon.org/mediacorps//>; “Ask Fox to Stop Terrorism Baiting,” <http://civic.moveon.org/mediacorps//mediacorps7.html>. The form to fill out to volunteer for the Media Corps is an Internet time capsule of sorts, illuminating the shift that has occurred in data transmission as a result of social media as it includes the following statement: “If you're an AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) user, we especially need your help. We're developing an IM-based instant response network. By adding your handle below, we'll be able to contact you with urgent, time-sensitive alerts that can make an impact more quickly than ever possible before.” Today this same information would be disseminated through Facebook, Twitter, and the like, none of which require a user to be tethered to a screen to receive a message courtesy of notifications.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Jon Pareles, “New Songs, Old Message: ‘No War’.”

shrinking the red carpet to “a vestigial doormat in front of the theater.”³¹⁵ This meant that although photographers were able to snap pictures between the limousine line and the front door, celebrities were not to stop for photographs or (more importantly) interviews.³¹⁶ While ceremony organizers suggested that this decision was motivated by safety concerns, as the awards show was scheduled just days after the war in Iraq began, others questioned whether it was an attempt to limit the expression of anti-war sentiment by celebrities before the show.³¹⁷ Sean Penn and Michael Sheen, both active and vocal participants in the anti-war movement, felt repercussions in their professional lives; Penn filed a lawsuit against a director who reneged on a \$10 million dollar deal for him to star in an upcoming film after he visited Baghdad; and Sheen (who played the US president on the *West Wing* at the time) was approached by NBC executives who “informed him that they were ‘very uncomfortable’ with his opposition to the Bush administration’s plans in Iraq.”³¹⁸ The Screen Actor’s Guild released an official statement right before the start of the Iraq War that spoke to similar pushback, making public that “Some have

³¹⁵ Jacqueline Mansky and Michael Walker, “Oscars Red Carpet: A Brief History,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 1, 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/oscar-red-carpet-a-brief-684482>.

³¹⁶ According to director Pedro Almodovar, who was being fitted for a tuxedo when the news of the red carpet cancellation broke, “the woman in charge of the fitting came out, nearly sobbing. ‘I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it! Oh my God, what are we going to do?’ It was as if there had been an actual tragedy. And I thought to myself, ‘This is the first American victim of the Iraq war—the fashion houses of Los Angeles.’” Lorenza Munoz, “Surreal even for him: Pedro Almodovar is plunged into Oscar hoopla amid a war he opposes,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/22/entertainment/et-munoz22>.

³¹⁷ This action limited the potential for political speech to just those individuals who were presenting or that won awards; many of the award winners—including actors Chris Carter, Adrien Brody, and Gael Garcia Bernal and directors Michael Moore and Pedro Almodovar—did in fact make statements about the war when accepting their awards. Other celebrities choose not to attend in deference to the fact the nation was actively at war. See: “Those Oscar war protests in full: Who boycotted, who ‘gave it a miss’, and who had something to say,” *The Guardian*, March 24, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/mar/24/awardsandprizes.oscars20031?redirection=guardian>.

³¹⁸ Nick Madigan, “Oscars Show Goes On, But Mood Is Subdued By the Fighting in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/24/movies/oscar-show-goes-on-but-mood-is-subdued-by-the-fighting-in-iraq.html?pagewanted=1>.

recently suggested that well-known individuals who express 'unacceptable' views should be punished by losing their right to work.”³¹⁹

While such forms of backlash are not surprising—a mainstream media that sided predominantly with the Bush administration combined with the mediated nature of celebrity life perhaps made this a foregone conclusion—they had the potential to impact the degree of success these organizations might have experienced. The most significant repercussion would have been the ability of the organizations to *successfully* connect with their respective publics. As the main point of connection between any of the organizations and the public was the media, the language and content of such media coverage was very important and although all of the organizations had their own websites and affiliated networks, they would have still relied on televisual, print, and Internet news media outlets to help direct people there. While those who would have already been sympathetic to the anti-war cause might have been largely unaffected by negative, disparaging, or, at the very least, dismissive media coverage, those who were undecided would have had to weigh and assess such media coverage *before* ever deciding to first peruse the texts produced by the actual organization and then (maybe) consider taking an anti-war position themselves. And, while media coverage might not have swayed those average citizen subjects who were sympathetic to the anti-war cause, it might have steered them towards participation in groups without celebrity members—groups comprised of their peers and/or people with knowledge and experience (the two traits that celebrity activists were repeatedly accused of not possessing as a means of discrediting).

³¹⁹ Ibid.

Perhaps because of the lack of tangible results, within the first couple of years after the US invasion of Iraq, wide-spread celebrity involvement in anti-war organizations had waned—celebrities who remained active, Sean Penn immediately comes to mind, did so to the continued detriment of their public persona. While participation in organized groups lessened, many individual celebrities maintained an anti-war presence through other means. One of the more common ways in which anti-war celebrities continued to express their political position was through War on Terror-related films.

Leveraging Cinema: Counter-Hegemonic Narrative as Politic Protest

While mainstream television news had the opportunity to immediately begin reporting on the War on Terror as it unfolded, cinematic representations of the same content were quick to follow—especially when the various aspects of production are taken into consideration. Within two years of the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers, scripted big-screen film depictions concerning various aspects of the War on Terror were released and distributed by major film studios.³²⁰ Unlike the Vietnam War, where only three major-motion pictures were produced during an active combat period of fifteen years, in the ten years immediately after 9/11, seventeen big-budget, celebrity-heavy, realistic narrative films were released.³²¹ The number of War on Terror related films increases if one takes into account lower budget films, fantasy or sci-fi films, those that

³²⁰ These are films about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the events of September 11, 2001, and terrorism generally (but typically Islamic-fundamentalism). The first of these films to appear was 2004's *Septem8er Tapes* a small-budget faux-documentary. Dir. Christian Johnson.

³²¹ The three films released during active combat in Vietnam were: *A Yank in Viet-Nam* dir. Marshall Thompson, (1964); *The Green Berets* dir. John Wayne, Ray Kellogg, and Mervyn LeRoy, (1968); and *Nam's Angels* dir. Jack Starett, (1970). Although there are many Vietnam War films, most of them were released years after the US had pulled out of the country. See Appendix One for the titles of all 17 films.

use various aspects of the War on Terror to drive the plot forward, or, as in the case of 2008's *Iron Man*, uses a place like war-torn Afghanistan as a setting.³²²

Despite the fact that it is often considered its own independent entity, Hollywood cinema is part of the modern wave of conglomeration that has defined American media over the past twenty years. In the first ten years of the 21st century, 90% of all media content was owned by the top six US corporations: GE, Newscorp, Disney, Viacom, Time-Warner, and CBS.³²³ These conglomerates offered holdings across a variety of media platforms: film, television (both network and cable), radio, print, and Internet. Time-Warner, for example, owned CNN, HBO, Time Inc., New Line Cinema, DC Comics, Castle Rock Entertainment, and Warner Bros. These films about the War on Terror were thus embedded in the very same commercial-corporate system as mainstream cable news; without funding from these corporations many, if not all, of these films would not have had the financial backing for distribution, let alone have existed in the first place. As part of the same system of media conglomerates as mainstream cable news, Hollywood cinema also had the potential to participate in the creation of narratives of the War on Terror, which the Bush White House did not overlook.

Acknowledging the power of mainstream Hollywood cinema to play an active role in the construction of dominant mass narratives, senior White House advisor Karl Rove met with representative members of Hollywood's major studios, television networks, and others responsible for distributing artistic content in early November of

³²² Although not under consideration, there have also been a large number of made-for-TV movies that fall into this category—the first, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, aired in November 2003, a mere seven months after the events it was meant to depict actually occurred and only eight months after the start of the second Iraq War. Dir. Peter Markle.

³²³ In 1983, 90% of American media was owned by 50 companies.

2001—the ‘creative’ parallels to the cable news industry. Although Rove was quick to point out that “the White House was not asking the entertainment industry to produce propaganda,” he also provided themes that he felt were best addressed in cinematic and televisual representations and which clearly reinforced the dominant-hegemonic narrative of the War on Terror:

1. The antiterrorism campaign is not a war against Islam.
2. There is an opportunity to issue a call to service for Americans.
3. U.S. troops and their families need support.
4. The September 11 attacks were an attack against civilization and require a global response.
5. Children need to be reassured of their safety and security in the wake of the attacks.
6. The antiterrorism campaign is a war against evil.³²⁴

However, it was primarily television—and particularly made-for-TV movies that were released on network television during the early stages of the War on Terror—that was most apt to follow Rove’s suggestions.³²⁵

Big-screen Hollywood representations of the War on Terror, which started to be released in earnest in 2006, eschewed Rove’s themes in general, tending to take a critical stance against the government (in policy, practice, and beliefs) and in the way information has been transmitted to and/or kept from ‘the people.’³²⁶ According to actor Robert Redford, in an interview for his War on Terror-related film *Lions for Lambs*, this

³²⁴ “Hollywood considers role in war effort,” *CNN*, November 11, 2001, http://articles.cnn.com/2001-11-11/us/rec.hollywood.terror_1_war-effort-hollywood-community-families-need-support?_s=PM:US. In the same article Rove is quoted as saying: “The world is full of people who are discerning, and we need to recognize that concrete information told with honesty and specificity and integrity is important to the ultimate success in this conflict,” which is oddly antithetical to much of the mainstream news reportage during the Bush-Cheney administration.

³²⁵ Movies and mini-series that were made for broadcast on cable networks tended to follow patterns more similar to mainstream Hollywood cinema.

³²⁶ The films that tend to break from this pattern are the two that directly deal with the events of September 11, 2001: *Flight 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass (2006); *World Trade Center*, dir. Oliver Stone (2006).

became easier over time: “Five years ago, or even four years ago, you were labeled unpatriotic if you said anything that went against what the administration was doing. Now, with the exposure of the truth it’s easier.”³²⁷ The implicit message of Redford being that the alternative narrative advanced by the anti-war organizations and films was truthful, unlike the dominant-hegemonic narrative. Acknowledging the relationship of Hollywood film production to both mainstream news media content and government rhetoric, Jerry Sherlock, director of the New York Film Academy, suggests that while the truth might be “exposed,” it still is needs to be widely spread: “I hope that the films coming out influence people. The truth sets us free, after all the bullshit that we get every day in Washington and the airways and Cheney... I am surprised it has taken so long.”³²⁸ Echoing Sherlock, and speaking specifically in reference to the films released about the Iraq War, Douglas Kellner identifies such movies as being part of a film cycle that “testified to disillusionment with... policy and helped compensate for mainstream corporate media neglect of the consequences of the war.”³²⁹

With at least two or three big name actors attached to them, many of whose names were also associated with the various celebrity anti-war organizations and thus already had established political personas, these films tended to focus on topics not widely or sufficiently covered in the mainstream news media, including: extraordinary rendition and the efficacy of torture; the ways in which soldiers are damaged by war and the

³²⁷ Rob Carnevale, “Lions for Lambs – Robert Redford interview,” *indieLondon*, nd, <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/lions-for-lambs-robert-redford-interview>.

³²⁸ Ewen MacAskill, “Hollywood tears up script to make anti-war films while conflicts rage,” August 13, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/14/iraq.film>.

³²⁹ Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era*, 222. The rogue reporter trying to ‘make things right’ against all odds is a popular character in these films. See for example the character of Lawrie Dayne (played by Amy Ryan) in the *Green Zone*, dir. Paul Greengrass, (2010).

potential for them to be reintegrated into civilian life; blowback and the mishandling and miscommunication between those responsible for the military and those responsible for the political aspects of war. Taken as a whole, the content of this War on Terror film cycle attempted to create an alternative narrative to that being produced by the White House and the mainstream news media. Like the work of Not in Our Name and Artists/Musicians United, the content of these films was meant as a form of consciousness-raising—of creating a well-informed population of ordinary citizens. For the anti-war organizations and many of the celebrities involved in the films, the ultimate goal being that exposure to said alternative narrative would compel average citizen-subjects to participate in the anti-war movement.

The parallel aim of consciousness-raising undertaken by both the celebrity anti-war organizations and the films that comprise the War on Terror film cycle is perhaps most blatantly evident in the interviews given by celebrities as part of the press tours that surrounded the release of said films. John Cusack, star of *Grace is Gone*, indicated that his film, about a father trying to make sense of the world after his soldier wife dies in Iraq, reflects a reality that average citizens do not have the opportunity to see:

Well the climate of the United States seems to me to be about denying pain...people are getting on with their lives and the war is this abstraction they see on television. When I wanted to do the movie, they had banned photos of the flag-draped coffins of the dead coming home. They said we control that too. So in case we haven't controlled enough, you don't even get to see the soldiers who are paying the ultimate price for this. So, in this climate to make this movie...I think there's a great denial of any sense of reality about this.³³⁰

³³⁰ Sheila Roberts, "John Cusack Interview, *Grace is Gone*," *Movies Online*, 2007, http://www.moviesonline.ca/movienews_13584.html.

Reese Witherspoon, in responding to a question as to why people might choose to watch the film *Rendition*, in which she stars, states that: “It’s sort of not just a film about a message where you sit there for two hours...I think it’s a movie that makes a lot of questions and it really makes you think about a lot of the practices that are going on nowadays, and whether or not they are legal or ethical or even constitutional.”³³¹

Discussing the film *The Messenger*, in which he plays a soldier charged with delivering death notices to the families of deceased soldiers, Woody Harrelson claimed that:

What the government always tried to do with the commercials and posters is get you to lump in the warriors with the war. Because they know you’ll care about the warriors, even though you may not care for the war...They’re not the ones who dictate foreign policy. That’s unfortunately been dictated by some Machiavellian assholes. And it’s not their fault that every time this government goes to war it’s over resources or over strategic positioning. It’s never over this concern with democracy.³³²

In its focus on the warriors, and the associated pain and loss that occurs outside the battle zone, Harrelson implies that *The Messenger* has the ability to allow for citizens to separate the warriors from the war.

George Clooney, in interview with MIT’s newspaper, *The Tech*, suggested that his upcoming film *Syriana* was not “political necessarily” as they screened it for “a lot of neocons who liked it and agreed with it.”³³³ Rather, their “argument, of course, is to raise a debate, not to tell people what the answers are, because clearly we don’t have any

³³¹ Rebecca Murray, “Reese Witherspoon, Jake Gyllenhaal and Director Gavin Hood Discuss ‘Rendition,’” *About Entertainment* (From the *Rendition* Press Conference), <http://movies.about.com/od/rendition/a/rendition100907.htm>.

³³² Audrey Kelly, “An Officer and a Gentleman,” *Fade In*, <http://fadeinonline.com/woody-harrelson-interview.html>.

³³³ Kapil Amarnath, “interview: Talking With George Clooney,” *The Tech*, December 13, 2005, <http://tech.mit.edu/V125/N61/61syriana.html>.

answers for this, the issues or the problems.”³³⁴ In other words, *Syriana* provides the missing information necessary (i.e., an alternative narrative) for a debate to exist to begin with. Jeremy Renner, the star of the Oscar-winning “non-political” Iraq War film, *The Hurt Locker*, goes as far as to claim that “politics and cinema...don’t match...don’t go together...Personally I like cinema like *The Hurt Locker*, because it doesn’t tell you what to feel or what to think. But it does tell you to think and feel.”³³⁵ Even these instances, where Clooney and Renner make a point of asserting that their films are neither political per se nor attempting to tell people what to think, it is clear that they believe that such films have the capacity to not just entertain but affectively and intellectually engage people.

Taking a counter-position to mainstream news media, these films also address the viewer in ways that are distinct to the mainstream news media. The first is in the difference in form—realistic narrative film as opposed to (what is presented as) the factual reportage of mainstream news media. The second is by positioning the viewer in such a way that it becomes impossible to positively identify fully with the government and representatives of the state. While identification with the government is a traditional means of interpellating citizen-subjects in mainstream news broadcasts, these films depict the US government and its various state agents as at least partially corrupt if not wholly politically and ethically bankrupt. The viewer is instead positioned in such a way that they identify with the individuals framed as the government’s victims—from the

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Andrew Martin, “Jeremy Renner Feels the Hurt,” *Interview Magazine*, August 4, 2009, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/hurt-locker#>.

powerless citizens of war-torn foreign lands to duped American citizens. Particularly in the way(s) in which they approach and handle the topics highlighted in their storytelling but also in the way that they position the viewer, these films can be seen as continuing the liberal democratic political ideology behind *Not in Our Name*, *Artists United*, and *Musicians United*.

Coming from an anti-war position, or at the very least one which did not accept the wide-spread justifications for going to war unquestioningly, the War on Terror films and the celebrity anti-war organizations aimed to engage citizen-subjects in similar conversations, albeit through different modes of address. These mainstream cinematic releases often represent points of clear deviation from dominant-hegemonic narrative construction, contradicting the “language of visual and thematic unity” scholars such as Robin Andersen suggest exists between the government and the narratives usually produced by mass culture.³³⁶ Whereas the case has been made (both in first Gulf War and in the War on Terror—especially in the first five or so years of the latter), that the mainstream news media was complicit with government attempts at subterfuge, the content of the films in this cycle often triggered a strong reaction from public figures, including representatives of the mainstream news media. The resulting accusations leveled against Hollywood filmmakers (and the celebrities who appeared in their films) ranged from the standard claims of liberal bias to a lack of patriotism to what became the most damning accusation of all: hating the troops. These types of accusations were flung around readily, most viciously by talking heads on the right. For example, Matthew

³³⁶ Robin Andersen, *A Century of Media, A Century of War*, XXVII.

Sheffield, writing for the right-wing website *NewsBusters*, discusses the “shameless” individuals behind a group of military “bashing” War on Terror films scheduled to be released, as: “Being the strapping patriot sort of folks that they are, the Hollywood left is gearing up to release a bunch of anti-military movies that portray veterans of the Iraq war as deranged psychopaths, screwed up by an ‘unjust’ war.”³³⁷

The vehement response of the right in particular suggests that the backlash for dissension with the White House’s dominant-hegemonic narrative that Christiane Amanpour feared, for example, was perhaps not unfounded.³³⁸ However, as previously noted, many (if not most) of these films were picked up for distribution by either the parent companies of the mainstream news media companies or subsidiaries of these parent companies. For example, *Syriana* was distributed by Warner Brothers, a subsidiary of AOL-Time Warner, who happens to also own CNN.³³⁹ Such films therefore cannot be considered independent creations and are technically part of the same corporate structure as television news and other media outlets.

Yet the fact exists that these War on Terror films and the mainstream news media were allowed to produce such drastically different narratives while existing under the same corporate structure. At the most basic level, this disjuncture was able to exist because the breadth of available narratives maximizes the possible viewing audience, thus maximizing the potential for profit—this is the obvious goal of corporations in a

³³⁷ Matthew Sheffield, “Hollywood to Launch Raft of Anti-military, Anti-war Movies,” *NewsBusters*, July 26, 2007, <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-sheffield/2007/07/26/hollywood-launch-raft-anti-military-anti-war-movies>.

³³⁸ Peter Johnson, “Amanpour: CNN practiced self-censorship,” September 14, 2003, http://www.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2003-09-14-media-mix_x.htm.

³³⁹ *Syriana*, dir. Stephen Gaghan, (2005).

capitalist marketplace. At a slightly deeper or less transparent level, the co-existence of such different narratives under the same corporate umbrella exposes the different cultural valuation afforded to the various media forms, which continues to distinguish between the ‘factual’ content of news media and the ‘fiction’ of narrative cinema. While Rove had hoped for ‘creative parallels’ between the entertainment and news industries, the understanding was that narrative television and cinema would serve to backup or reinforce the content of the narrative perpetuated by the news media as opposed to narrative television and cinema being sources of factual reportage on their own, as the two are first and foremost understood as forms of fictional entertainment. This lack of gravity afforded to narrative cinema perhaps then informs the type and content of the critical reviews given to the War on Terror films.

With rare exception, the films that make up this War on Terror film cycle were largely dismissed by critics (if not outwardly panned, depending on the political leaning of the reviewer or how offensive they found the film’s content) and received a lukewarm reception, at best, at the box office.³⁴⁰ This is especially true in the United States, as many of these films tended to make more money outside of, rather than within, the US.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ The two films which clearly break out of this mold are *Syriana*, which George Clooney won both an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor and *The Hurt Locker*, which won Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Film Editing. Whereas *Syriana* had a world-wide gross of roughly double what it cost to produce, *The Hurt Locker* is notable, in part, because it is the lowest grossing Best Picture winner to date, barely recouping the cost of production. *The Hurt Locker*, dir. Kathryn Bigelow, (2008).

³⁴¹ This was also reflective of opinions towards the Iraq War initially, and the comfort-level discussing the execution of the War on Terror as a mistake more generally, as it played out in the US versus how it played out globally. See for example: Patrick E. Tyler, “A New Threat in the Streets,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/17/world/threats-and-responses-news-analysis-a-new-power-in-the-streets.html>; and “Pulse of Democracy,” *The Gallup Poll*, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070703032959/http://www.galluppoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1633&pg=3>.

The 2007 film *Lions for Lambs*, starring Tom Cruise, Robert Redford, and Meryl Streep is a good example of this, with an estimated budget of 35 million dollars; it only recouped just under 15 million in the US but 48 million internationally.³⁴² In a *New York Post* review of the film, Kyle Smith equates the film to the “liberal fantasies” he was subjected to in an undergraduate Political Science class—reframing the distinction of fact versus fiction—and elaborating that, “if you want to be bored by pompous-assery, ‘Meet the Press’ is free.”³⁴³ According to a positive review of Kimberly Pierce’s 2008 *Stop-Loss*, there was a “war raging between audiences and films about Iraq,” resulting in “box-office casualties.”³⁴⁴ The war raging between the two groups was often articulated as a matter of timing: most reviewers tended at some point in their review to suggest that one of the critical faults with the movie at hand was that it was appearing “too soon” in relation to the events of 9/11 and to the wars then-currently still being waged. As critic Owen Gleiberman writes, “I can’t help but wonder if ‘too soon’ has become not just our explanation but our excuse — a knee-jerk justification for an America that has checked out on the promise of movies that delve into the issues of our time,” suggesting that the issue was not that viewers were unready to deal with the alternative narratives presented in these films, but that they were unwilling to do so.³⁴⁵

³⁴² IMDB Pro.

³⁴³ Kyle Smith, “Sheep Shots,” *NY Post*, November 9, 2007, http://www.nypost.com/p/entertainment/movies/item_oA9KIAA8oENFc7NC91UfrI.

³⁴⁴ Peter Travers, “Stop-Loss,” *Rolling Stone*, March 28, 2008, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/stop-loss-20080328>. An aside about *Stop-Loss*: this film was produced (in part) and branded as an MTV film, the same Viacom company who would not run the advertisements from Musicians United on their domestic station because they were advocacy spots and who heavily censored station content abroad.

³⁴⁵ Owen Gleiberman, “Movie Review: Rendition,” October 17, 2007, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20152821,00.html>.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to looking more closely at three films that were a part of this War on Terror film cycle—*Rendition* (2007), *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), and *The Green Zone* (2010).³⁴⁶ These three films were selected out of the many released in the ten years after 9/11 because they cover the whole range of topics related to the War on Terror, and the military campaigns waged as part of this larger ideological war, that were broached by the many films released. While this last section of the chapter is focused on the actual films and not explicitly on the celebrities, the films that comprise the War on Terror film cycle are being understood as *examples* of liberal democratic political speech acts by the celebrities starring in them and participating in their creation. These films serve as a visual enactment of the alternative narrative that celebrities attempted to advance through their participation in the various anti-war organizations, to which the protest songs of the 1960s can be understood as the closest analogue.

The Case Against Torture: *Rendition*

If you want a serious interrogation, you send a prisoner to Jordan. If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear -- never to see them again -- you send them to Egypt.

Robert Baer, Former CIA Agent³⁴⁷

In all the years you've been doing this, how often can you say that we've produced truly legitimate intelligence? Once? Twice? Ten times? Give me a statistic; give me a number. Give me a pie chart, I love pie charts. Anything, anything that outweighs the fact that if you torture one person you create ten, a hundred, a thousand new enemies.

³⁴⁶ *Rendition*, DVD, directed by Gavin Hood (2007; Los Angeles, CA: New Line Productions); *In the Valley of Elah*, DVD, directed by Paul Haggis (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video); *Green Zone*, DVD, directed by Paul Greengrass (2010: Universal City, CA: Universal Studios).

³⁴⁷ ACLU, "Fact Sheet: Extraordinary Rendition," <http://www.aclu.org/national-security/fact-sheet-extraordinary-rendition>.

Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal),
*Rendition*³⁴⁸

Released in 2007, *Rendition* is a film about juxtapositions, used to assess and assign blame for the events that caused and drive the War on Terror. Although *Rendition* is (roughly) based on the true story of Khalid El-Masri, who was mistaken for a man of a similar name alleged to be involved in the terrorist attacks of September 11, abducted, and held in a CIA black site in Afghanistan for 5 months, at the time of the film's release the tactic of extraordinary rendition and the accompanying psychological and physical torture that the film depicts received very little mainstream news coverage. As such, *Rendition* is also a cinematic attempt at not just creating an alternative narrative of the War on Terror to that provided by the White House and the mainstream news media, but also about filling in or eliminating elisions in mainstream reportage.

The plot of *Rendition* is set into motion by a terrorist suicide-bombing in a North African square that results not in the death of its target, Abasi Fawal (Yigal Naor), who we later learn is employed by the US government to interrogate and torture (suspected) terrorists and their allies, but in that of an upper-level CIA agent. Egyptian-American chemical engineer, Anwar El-Ibrahimi (Omar Metwally) is linked via phone records to a terrorist organization potentially responsible for the bombing and, upon returning to the US from a conference in South Africa, is abducted from the airport at the request of CIA official Corrine Whitman (Meryl Streep) and sent to a secret detention center located near the site of the attack. El-Ibrahimi's abduction, and particularly the logic behind it, are never clearly elucidated and events happen so quickly that other than *knowing* that he was

³⁴⁸ Hood, *Rendition*, 2007.

abducted by the US, the viewer is initially left in almost as much of the dark as El-Ibrahimi's pregnant and panicked wife, Isabella (Reese Witherspoon).

CIA analyst Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal), due to the death of his boss during the bombing and the subsequent lack of experienced personnel on hand, is tapped to observe El-Ibrahimi's torture-interrogation by Fawal (the target of the opening attack). After being witness to water-boarding, electrocution, and other explicit scenes of torture—which finally result in what turns out to be a false confession, El-Ibrahimi's named accomplices, when vetted, turn out to be the 1990 Egyptian soccer team—Freeman begins to not only believe that El-Ibrahimi is innocent, but also begins to question the efficacy of Fawal's (and by extension, the US's) methods of interrogation. This dual-revelation for Freeman leads him to falsify release papers for El-Ibrahimi in order to get him out of the detention center and circuitously back to the United States. As all this is occurring, the viewer is simultaneously given a thorough lesson in the background of what is actually happening at the detention site as Isabella takes a trip to Washington DC to enlist the help of her friend and senator's aide, Alan Smith (Peter Sarsgaard). As Isabella and Smith piece together the details of El-Ibrahimi's disappearance, including Whitman's involvement, the viewer pieces together the story of extraordinary rendition.

Rendition also tells the parallel storyline of the illicit romance between Fawal's daughter, Fatima (Zineb Oukach), and her beau Khalid (Moa Khouas).³⁴⁹ Unbeknownst to Fatima, Khalid's brother died at the hands of her father in the detention center, turning

³⁴⁹ I refer to this romance as illicit because it is a rejection of the traditional, arranged pairing—Fatima and Khalid are seemingly drawn together by love.

Khalid into a terrorist whose primary target is her father. When Fatima learns of Khalid's plans, she goes to stop him, begging him not to kill her father. Fatima's pleading gives Khalid pause, and even though he removes the pin from the bomb's detonator, he does not release the handle.³⁵⁰ The elder organizers of the attack notice Khalid's hesitation, and shoot him. As he falls to the ground, his hand releases the handle of the detonator, triggering the explosion that not only kills the CIA Agent but Fatima as well. Up until this point, the story of Fatima and Khalid seems to occur simultaneously with the main storyline discussed above; it is only until these final scenes in the square that viewer finds out that this story is a story of the past, that their story is the trigger for all of the events that the viewer just witnessed.

The messages of *Rendition* are driven by juxtaposition; it is a story *about* and told *through* the use of binary oppositions, including: East(Muslim)/West, Modern/'Primitive,' Cynical/Idealistic, Young/Old, and perhaps the most obvious, Good/Evil. Visually and aurally, the juxtaposition of East/West and Modern/Primitive are the most striking and obvious—the differences between the modern, Western world and the primitive, Eastern world are made clear from the beginning and utilized throughout the film to provide a clear demarcation of space and place. Like other films set in Muslim countries (as well as news media footage of these same areas), *Rendition* relies on familiar backdrops to provide context—the market place, the square, and the mosque play leading roles. These places and spaces are defined by the high-saturated color of the objects—human, animal, and man-made—set in the monochromatic desert

³⁵⁰ Earlier in the film, Fawal leads the viewer in a step-by-step demonstration of how the detonators used by suicide bombers work, as he attempts to justify torture as an interrogation technique to Freeman.

environment, constant hustle and bustle (no one is ever completely still), and the high noise level.³⁵¹ In contrast, the modern West is the visual and aural opposite in every way—there is an overall lack of color (this is especially true once Isabella goes to DC, leaving the safety of the domestic sphere), people almost never appear in large, active groups, and loud noises rarely occur.³⁵² Although this clearly suggests that *Rendition* is relying on an all too familiar code of Orientalism as a means of depicting a clearly identifiable (and already legible) other, these differences in depiction are also used as a transitional marker for the viewer—a means of knowing where a particular scene is occurring.³⁵³ While seemingly insignificant, the other juxtapositions employed by the film are *not* bounded by space and place; they exist in both East and West and serve as a thread connecting disparate individuals.

In *Rendition*, the juxtaposition of Cynical/Idealistic and Good/Evil is tied up in the battle between younger and older generations.³⁵⁴ Pitting members of the (positively portrayed) younger generation against members of (more negatively portrayed) older generations can be seen playing out, to a certain extent, in all of the films considered as part of the post-9/11 anti-war film cycle, most likely because it can be used to sympathetically frame other issues. Violence—whether suicide bombing or torture—is the result of evil and cynicism, instigated and (often) carried out by an older generation,

³⁵¹ Silence only occurs in the moments immediately after the bomb goes off.

³⁵² The scenes featuring Corrine Whitman in her kitchen are illustrative of this contrast—in every one of these scenes she sits, either drinking coffee or quietly on the phone, with her housekeeper working silently in the starkly white-tiled kitchen.

³⁵³ Perhaps the detention center can potentially be seen as the collision of these aural and visual juxtapositions?

³⁵⁴ Young/Old is a juxtaposition that seems to play out, to a certain extent, in all three movies under consideration.

particularly those with access to power or authority. The characters of Corrine Whitman, Abasi Fawal, and the older (unnamed) men who organize terrorist suicide bombings represent the cynical and often evil older generation—always pitted against Douglas Freeman, Isabella El-Ibrahimi, Alan Smith, and Khalid/Fatima. Although it is the bomb strapped to Khalid that sets everything in motion (specifically, El-Ibrahimi’s abduction and torture), we are shown that when faced with love and hope for a different and (possibly better) future, *he* hesitates—*he* still has goodness inside him. But Khalid’s opportunity to act, to show the goodness in and of youth, is cut short by his elders. Although the bomb is strapped to Khalid, and the detonator is in his hand, in the end, the older generation causes the bomb to go off. And, as we simultaneously find out with Fatima, Khalid’s rage, his desire to kill, only comes as a result of the actions of Fawal, her father, whose methods of interrogation resulted in the death of Khalid’s brother. And it is Whitman who is responsible “for moving people covertly,” who sees Fawal’s interrogations—carried out on her orders—not as torture, but as doing a necessary “job.”³⁵⁵ Fawal never flinches during interrogations; Freeman’s idealism, freshness, and innocence are constantly contrasted with Fawal’s hardened and cynical approach—Freeman could never be as savage as Fawal or Whitman. Thus, it could be argued that although the East is depicted as primitive, this is a specific type of primitivism, rooted in a lack of technology and modern architecture. In other words, this primitivism has to do with material surroundings and does not extend to the behaviors or beliefs of an entire (geographically-located) people. Unlike news media coverage, which positions “Islamic

³⁵⁵ Hood, *Rendition*, 2007.

terrorists...as the fanatic guardians of an archaic and oppressive way of life struggling violently against western hegemony and modernization,” in *Rendition*, the older generations of the East *and* West are equally primitive.³⁵⁶ As Douglas Kellner suggests, in *Rendition* “Terror war is thus shown as a tragic consequence of out-of control forces in the Muslim and Western world, both of which have descended into barbarism,” which has also been articulated by Tariq Ali and others as a “clash of fundamentalisms.”³⁵⁷

Rendition is also interested in constructing an alternative narrative and eliminating the elisions in mainstream news media mentioned earlier. Although he sees *Rendition* as being “limited by its liberal humanism,” Douglas Kellner believes that it is successful in that it focuses on the consequences of US actions in the Middle East (in particular, the production instead of the elimination of enemies) by “dramatizing the US outsourcing of terror interrogations (a.k.a. torture), and by putting a human face on the seizure, detention, and brutal treatment of terror suspects.”³⁵⁸ Yet, *Rendition* is as much about focusing on the consequences of US actions and policies as it is about shedding light on the actual actions and policies themselves—in particular focusing on the policy, techniques, and tactics of extraordinary rendition and torture based interrogation and then proceeding to question these very same policies, techniques, and tactics.

This secondary aim of the film becomes transparent not just in the graphic depictions of interrogation and torture (which are illustrated as becoming incrementally

³⁵⁶ Mark Andrejevic, “Interactive (In)security,” *Cultural Studies* 20:4, 443.

³⁵⁷ Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 248; Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity*.

³⁵⁸ Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 246. The assessment of *Rendition* as successfully “putting a human face” on extraordinary rendition and the practice of torture is echoed in reviews of the film. See Roger Ebert’s review, for example.

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071018/REVIEWS/710180307>.

more severe until some form of confession occurs, at which point El-Ibrahimi is given back his clothes and becomes a “normal” prisoner) and Freeman’s reaction to these scenes of torture, but also in Isabella and Smith’s quest to find answers stateside. While Isabella’s determination to find answers is partly attributable to love, the tagline of the film is, after all, “What if someone you love...just disappeared,” her enlisting of Smith to help her is used as a plot device to attest to the veracity of the events being depicted in the film. Although the actual story being told is only roughly inspired by a particular real-life situation, *Rendition* works to make it evident that the type of scenario depicted (extraordinary rendition and the interrogation techniques employed) actually does occur. An example of this is the speech delivered by Smith (Sarsgaard) about halfway into the film, as he and Isabella (Witherspoon) stroll among the monuments in DC.



Figure 2: Still of Reese Witherspoon and Peter Sarsgaard in *Rendition*

In this speech, Smith not only explains to Isabella (and the viewer) what extraordinary rendition is (and therefore what happened to her husband), but places the policy and practice of extraordinary rendition in its *real-life* historical and political context.

Extraordinary rendition, we learn, can and does happen. In this instance, the choice of Witherspoon for the role of Isabella is particularly significant. Cast most often as the sweet or good-hearted ‘girl-next-door’ in films such as *Legally Blonde* or *Sweet Home Alabama*, Witherspoon can easily stand in the place of the average citizen watching the film.³⁵⁹ This the makes it easier for the viewer to not only understand that extraordinary rendition not only can and does happen, but to connect it to self: extraordinary rendition can and does happen to *us*.

³⁵⁹ *Legally Blonde*, DVD, directed by Robert Luketic (2001; Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer); *Sweet Home Alabama*, DVD, directed by Andy Tennant (2002; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures).

Not only does the inclusion of Smith's speech provide a bridge or connection between the fictional events depicted in the film to factual events in the real world that the viewer exists in, it also suggests that director Gavin Hood and screenwriter Kelley Sane believed that the audience needed such an explanation—that they couldn't assume that the viewer had previous knowledge of and would therefore be able to identify or decode what was occurring in the film without the inclusion of Smith's speech. It also, both explicitly and implicitly, sets the practice of extraordinary rendition against many of the tenets most dear to a liberal democratic political position—not the least of which would clearly be the focus on civil rights. As *Rendition*, and as an extension, the film's stars make exceedingly clear, extraordinary rendition and torture treat individuals as being less than equal, stripping them of their physical freedom without due process, and are therefore not tactics of a just war.

Coming Up Empty: *Green Zone*

You think I do this for money? You think I don't care about my country? I see what's happening. You don't think I see what's happening? You don't think I do this for me? For my future? For my country? For all these things? Whatever you want here, I want more than you want. I want to help my country...

Freddy (Khalid Abdalla), *Green Zone*³⁶⁰

Released in 2010, the *Green Zone* suggests that while the physical acts of war between citizens of different countries are clearly important—and are used to forward the traditional action movie visuals within the film—it is the ideological war waged between citizens of a single country that is highlighted as most important. Or, as per a review in

³⁶⁰ Greengrass, *Green Zone*, 2010

the *New York Post*, the *Green Zone* “is a \$100 million slime job that conjures up a fantastically distorted leftist version of the war and wraps it around a frantic but preposterous action picture.”³⁶¹ Like *Rendition*, the *Green Zone* posits that there is a correct side to this ideological war. The film suggests that the dominant war narrative that we as viewers have come to believe as true is fundamentally wrong and that the alternative narrative advanced by the *Green Zone* is the (most) correct. And the choice of Matt Damon as the main character (Roy Miller) helps to steer the viewer towards identification with the correct side of ideological narrative war—Damon is often cast in movies as either the wholesome all-American or the hero (or sometime both), the former of which being a persona he has managed to somewhat successfully perpetuate in real life, which is no small feat considering that he is known for his left-leaning political activism.³⁶² Ultimately, the *Green Zone* is a film about the war being fought between and about Americans.

³⁶¹ Kyle Smith, “New Damon flick slanders America,” *New York Post*, March 9, 2010, <http://nypost.com/2010/03/09/new-damon-flick-slanders-america/>.

³⁶² This is not to say that Matt Damon is not a contentious figure for individuals on the far right; according to the director of media analysis for the conservative Media Research Center, Damon “sits squarely in the camp of actors often labeled as the Hollywood liberal elite.” However, unlike others who the right has grouped in this camp—like Sean Penn—I would argue that the general public do not apply the ‘overly-politicized liberal’ label to Damon. Jo Piazza, “Critics Decry Matt Damon Movie ‘The Green Zone,’ Calling It ‘Anti-American,’” *Fox News*, March 11, 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2010/03/11/new-matt-damon-movie-green-zone-called-appallingly-anti-american/>.



Figure 3: Still of Matt Damon in the *Green Zone*

Set in Iraq immediately after the US invasion in 2003, the *Green Zone* tells the story of Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller (Matt Damon), leader of one of the squads in charge of investigating and eliminating sites that intelligence reports claim to house Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).³⁶³ None of the intelligence pans out and higher-level officers and Pentagon officials repeatedly dismiss Miller's suggestion that there may be a problem with the intelligence—the faultiness of the intelligence is confirmed for Miller in a roundabout way by CIA agent Martin Brown (Brendan Gleeson) after a military-intelligence debriefing.³⁶⁴ Like Miller, Brown might question the intelligence provided

³⁶³ The *Green Zone* credits Rajiv Chandrasekaran's non-fiction work *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* as its inspiration.

³⁶⁴ The viewer's questioning of the intelligence, and therefore, their "siding" with Miller, is set up in a variety of angles from the beginning of the film, such as when *Wall Street Journal* reporter Lawrie Dayne (Amy Ryan) is stonewalled by Poundstone when she requests to know the identity of "Magellan," the supposed source of all WMD intelligence. Poundstone is the only one who knows "Magellan's" true

by the Pentagon, but, as the viewer finds out much later, he has his own ill-guided plans for Iraq. Thus, like *Rendition*, the *Green Zone* quickly positions older and younger generations against one another, with youth as hopeful and the source of potential positive change. This occurs in a more complicated manner in the *Green Zone* than in *Rendition*, as younger actors are also pitted against Miller, the representative of youth in this film. In part, this tension is solved in *Green Zone* by aligning these younger, “evil” characters with state institutions and thus as having greater access to power and authority, things typically associated with age. Age becomes synonymous with positions of power. Neither film presents an older character or a character with institutional or governmental power as wholly in the category of “good,” as a hero figure.

During yet another mission that fails to result in a cache of WMD, Miller’s presence is requested by an Iraqi, Freddy (Khalid Abdalla), who claims to know of and wants to lead Miller to a gathering of upper-level Ba’athist officials at a nearby location. Although his fellow soldiers question Miller’s decision to follow Freddy, he makes his case by claiming that instead of digging holes all day, he “wants to get something done.”³⁶⁵ When Miller et al. storm the house where the meeting is supposedly occurring, they discover all of the Ba’athist officials fleeing, including General Mohammed Al-Rawi (Yigal Naor), the Jack of Clubs in the deck of most-wanted Iraqi cards being

identity. We later find out that Dayne has written numerous articles about Iraq’s WMD program, all based on “Magellan’s” supposed intel. Dayne seems to be based on journalist Judith Miller, although the character is depicted as being more at odds with and doubtful of the Bush administration than it seems Miller ever was.

³⁶⁵ Greengrass, *Green Zone*, 2010.

carried around by coalition troops, but only manage to capture one man.³⁶⁶ After the man that they capture is taken by special forces soldiers working directly for Pentagon official Clark Poundstone (Greg Kinnear)—the captured Iraqi is only able to mouth the word “Jordan” to Miller before being whisked away—Miller begins to fully question the validity of the entire mission and goes rogue, taking Freddy along as his interpreter (and possibly passport into the Arab world?).³⁶⁷

The crux of Miller’s mission is to discover the identity of “Magellan,” the supposed source of the intelligence reports on Iraq’s WMD program, which results, after a series of face-offs with Poundstone and his special forces, in Miller’s meeting face to face with Al-Rawi, whom we not only learn is Magellan but that the information attributed to him is a lie. As Al-Rawi states: “Your government wanted to hear the lie Mr. Miller... they wanted Saddam out and they did exactly what they had to do... this is why you are here...”³⁶⁸ The location of Miller and Al-Rawi’s meeting is stormed by Poundstone’s men, forcing the standard action movie chase. Again, Miller eventually catches up with Al-Rawi, only for Al-Rawi to be shot by Freddy, who claims, “It is not for you to decide what happens here.” The film ends with Miller typing up the “true” report on Iraq’s WMD program, sending it as an email attachment to Dayne and a series of other reporters.

The *Green Zone*, like *Rendition*, could be categorized as a “message” film, inspired by and loosely following factual events, that attempts to create an alternative

³⁶⁶ In case you were wondering, yes, this is the *same* Yigal Naor who played the interrogator in *Rendition*. The Israeli actor also played Saddam Hussein in the TV miniseries, *House of Saddam*.

³⁶⁷ The tagline for *Green Zone* is: “Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller is done following orders.”

³⁶⁸ Al-Rawi is inadvertently responding to Miller’s desire to know precisely why he is in Iraq—something he brings up repeatedly to other Americans throughout the course of the film.

narrative. Yet unlike *Rendition*, whose forward motion is propelled by intense drama and a paucity of fast-paced action, the *Green Zone* is more easily read as just one of many action-thrillers.³⁶⁹ As *New York Times* review A.O. Scott suggests, while the director and screenwriter of the *Green Zone* “compress, simplify and invent according to the imperatives of the genre,” the film still maintains the “rough authority of novelistic truth.”³⁷⁰ The pacing of the film combined with a lack of concrete historical background makes it easy to forget that the general events depicted in the *Green Zone* did actually occur, just not quite in the way depicted on the screen —the viewer never is never presented with any sort of contextual historical knowledge, based on the belief that the viewer probably doesn’t already know the subject, a la Smith’s monologue on the background of extraordinary rendition. At the same time, as the *Green Zone* was released in 2010 (7 years after the events depicted, and, depending on your source, roughly 6 years after it became generally known that Iraq did not have stockpiles of WMD), this lack of historical grounding might be because the film is dealing with common knowledge. Thus, instead of providing a monologue like Smith’s in *Rendition*, the *Green Zone* provides the viewer with visual memory triggers, such as the voices of CNN reporters documenting the opening shots of the reenactment of the “Shock and Awe” bombing campaign or the scene of reporters and military and intelligence personnel watching

³⁶⁹ This is especially true, as *Green Zone*’s director is known for the *Bourne* films, also starring Matt Damon. One reviewer on IMDB.com was actually critical of anyone who would read *Green Zone* as more than entertainment, claiming that: “I say ‘inspired’ because ‘Green Zone’ is fiction—unless I blinked and missed it, there’s no opening title card claiming ‘based on a true story’.” Conservatives, so often unable to discern fact from fiction, will view the film as a piece of docudrama reportage and find it deeply flawed, as it would be if it purported to be such a thing.” Rathko, “Superior Conspiracy Thriller,” March 18, 2010, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0947810>.

³⁷⁰ A.O. Scott, “A Search for That Casualty, Truth,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2010, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/movies/12green.html>.

footage of Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech on television, in order to place the storyline in an already familiar historical framework. This archival footage is used to bolster and verify the truth claims of the film, positioning the alternative narrative being presented within a timeline of events that actually existed. Common knowledge becomes common truth. The *Green Zone* clearly does not believe that it is telling the viewer a completely *new* story; rather it is uncovering (a variation of) the *complete* story for the viewer, with Miller serving as the surrogate detective for the US populace and the hope for the and our future. This positioning of Miller as surrogate and the related assertion of truth claims, as previously suggested, are bolstered by Damon's on- and off-screen persona. Representing the all-American hero type, Damon's relative youth is pitted against power, synonymous for age in the *Green Zone*.

The *Green Zone*, like *Rendition*, presents generations as being at odds with one another. Both films utilize the juxtaposition of age—and its accompanying privileges such as access, or lack thereof, to power and authority—as a means of laying blame. Other binaries, such as cynicism/idealism or good/evil are directly linked to age. In particular, the *Green Zone* positions Miller as the *lone* young hero wanting to ensure that there is justice in the world. Although it is positioning youth against age, like what occurs in *Rendition*, the *Green Zone* also seems to suggest that those who partake in the benefits of age (particularly access to power and authority) or follow the orders of their elders, instead of going rogue like Miller, are just as guilty. What is perhaps most interesting about the *Green Zone* is how it goes about ascribing blame.

In the *Green Zone* blame is less complicated than in *Rendition*. Unlike *Rendition*, which suggests that the older generations of *both* the Muslim and Western worlds are to blame for the savagery, evil, and lack of hope in the world, in the *Green Zone* blame is unilaterally assigned to the Western world, and in particular those who hold power in the US (the older generation). The viewer is provided no historical context for what has occurred in Iraq—we know from various things said by the character of Freddy that it hasn't been good, *per se*, and that he desires change, but this is the extent of what the viewer is told about Iraq—nor do Iraqis play any type of significant role except to serve as Miller's translator (although, ironically, translation is rarely needed) and as a map for tracing the corruption of the older generation of Americans (and the corrupted youth who carry out their plans).

Freddy's dialogue, when it occurs, almost always is centered on at least one of two things. First, the fact that the current American leadership is corrupt and in need of being changed, illustrated in the delivery of such lines by Freddy as "I want to *help* my country," suggesting that contrary to rhetoric, American leadership does not.³⁷¹ Or, second, that American leadership has no place in making decisions for other countries which should be allowed the freedom implicit in sovereignty, illustrated by the line Freddy delivers when he shoots Al-Rawi. Both of these are attempts to forge points of critical and engaged identification with 'good' Iraqi citizens over identifying with 'bad' Americans—both of which bolster the identification with the ultimate hero, the 'good' American, Miller. Even General Al-Rawi, who, although we are told has a place in the

³⁷¹ Greengrass, *Green Zone*, 2010.

card deck of Iraq's most wanted, serves not as a sign of the evil in Iraq, but as a plot device for illustrating the corruption of America because of older Americans. It is Al-Rawi, and not an American, who finally not only unveils the truth to Miller—that it is he who American intelligence briefings have referred to as “Magellan”—but also that the information that he shared with the Americans (that there were no WMD), was twisted and corrupted. Although Freddy's murder of Al-Rawi suggests that Al-Rawi is, in the end, evil—Freddy is unquestionably positioned as a good character—because we are never given context for his choice of actions, the shooting ends up being of lesser significance than Freddy's statement that “[it] is not for you to decide what happens here.”³⁷²

To a certain degree, the *Green Zone* is an Iraq War movie that isn't really about war. The opening scenes of the film, which show Al-Rawi and his family fleeing their palatial home while Baghdad is bombed in the background, are noted as occurring four months before main plot of the film is said to commence. Except for this scene, and the epic chase scene towards the end of the film—which could easily be read as a necessity of the genre as much as anything else—there are few signs of war. Although the movie is full of soldiers, there is very little actual combat and no enemy willing to begin the fight—the only Iraqis shown shooting are Al-Rawi's bodyguards and they never shoot first. Thus, the war being fought on the screen is between and about Americans—which might be one of the reasons why this film was met with such derision from the right, labeled as “slander” and “the most egregiously anti-American movie ever released by a

³⁷² Ibid.

major studio.”³⁷³ In this instance Iraq happens to be the staging ground which is at odds with the *Green Zone*’s other aim: to create an alternative narrative by filling in gaps in factual knowledge with their fictional rendering on the screen. At the same time, the *Green Zone* is as interested in criticizing the deception of the “people” by those in power as it is in taking a distinctly anti-war position, a point I will return to later.

Signals of a Distressed Country: *In the Valley of Elah*

He couldn’t wait to get over there, to help the good guys. We shouldn’t send heroes to Iraq.

SPC. Gordon Bonner (Jake McCloughlin), *In the Valley of Elah*³⁷⁴

In the Valley of Elah, released in 2007, represents a greater divergence from the standard war film than either *Rendition* or *Green Zone*.³⁷⁵ Set entirely within the United States, except for the random brief POV-style video clips shot by soldiers in Iraq, *In the Valley of Elah* provides an anti-war perspective without relying on the visual depiction of fighting a war in a far-off place. Instead, *In the Valley of Elah* is about what the Iraq War does to soldiers and the ripple-effect consequences of war.

In the Valley of Elah begins with Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) receiving an early morning phone call informing him that his son, Mike, whom he thought was still in Iraq, has gone AWOL. Instead of relying on the military police (MP) to find him, and perhaps sensing that something is not right, Deerfield, as a former MP officer, drives from Tennessee to New Mexico to launch his own investigation. Before the viewer is

³⁷³ Piazza, “Critics Decry Matt Damon...”

³⁷⁴ Haggis, *In the Valley of Elah*, 2007.

³⁷⁵ This departure is why I’ve saved discussion of this film for last, instead of approaching them chronologically.

actually informed that Deerfield was once in the military himself, his methodical, fastidious, and intentional way of doing everything from packing a suitcase to getting dressed speak to his past. Arriving in New Mexico, Deerfield meets a series of barriers—from the MP to the local police; either no one sees his son's disappearance as worth pursuing or, as Detective Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron) notes, it is out of their jurisdiction. This all changes when a charred and dismembered corpse is discovered in a field not far from the base.

Deerfield is unsatisfied with the determination that his son's death was a result of the drug trade or a deal gone sour and the rest of the film revolves around his and Sanders' quest for the truth. As the storyline unfolds, Sanders (and the viewer) begin to suspect the involvement (or at least complicity) of Mike's fellow soldiers—as a former member of the military, Deerfield is stubbornly the last to come around to this way of thinking, which turns out to be accurate. In the matter-of-fact confession that occurs near the end of the film, we learn that one of Mike's fellow soldiers, Penning, is the one who stabbed him but that “on another night it could have been Mike with the knife and me in the field.”³⁷⁶ Although he has solved the mystery of his son's death, the movie ends with an overall lack of closure and unease for both Deerfield and the viewer.

Like both *Rendition* and the *Green Zone*, *In the Valley of Elah* is partially about the creation of an alternative narrative and the uncovering of truths—on its surface level, it is quite literally a detective story. Yet, even though like the other films the story is inspired by/based on actual events, *In the Valley of Elah* is not about filling in gaps in

³⁷⁶ Haggis, *In the Valley of Elah*, 2007.

concrete historical knowledge—although it subtly suggests that the War in Iraq is without justification, the film doesn't aim to expose the policy, practice, or deception. Rather, *In the Valley of Elah* is interested in conveying what the Iraq War *does* physically, emotionally, and psychologically to the soldiers who fight and how this ripples out within American society as a whole, none of which were sufficiently covered by the mainstream media. *Time* magazine reviewer Richard Schickel suggests that it is a movie “designed not so much to make you think, but to make you feel the impact of large events on little lives.”³⁷⁷ Consequently, the viewer does not sit through a speech on torture tactics nor are they shown actual news footage from the time period—which takes away the soapbox or overtly political quality that many reviewers (and viewers) found offensive in films like *Rendition* or *Green Zone*. Instead, the viewer serves as a witness to the aftermath of these very things through the emotional breakdown of a dead soldier's parents.

Standing witness to the parents' breakdown is made more powerful through the choice of casting in these roles, particularly that of Tommy Lee Jones as the father, who is known on and off-screen for being “difficult, ornery, curt, and contentious.”³⁷⁸ While a Democrat with somewhat left-leaning politics, Jones does not have the same reputation as Susan Sarandon, who is well-known not just for being part of ‘liberal Hollywood,’ but for

³⁷⁷ Richard Schickel, “*In the Valley of Elah*: Sad, Subtle and Moving,” *Time*, September 14, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1661963,00.html>.

³⁷⁸ Skip Hollandsworth, “Tommy Lee Jones Is Not Acting,” *Texas Monthly*, February 2006, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/tommy-lee-jones-is-not-acting/>. There was a campaign to draft Jones to run for Texas Senator in 2011, as the actor was the only “Democrat in Texas that has the necessary name ID, that has positive name ID, that would be able to raise money, and that would have at least the potential to attract string voters and a substantial number of Republicans...” Megan Friedman, “Senator Tommy Lee Jones? A Texas Democrat (Seriously) Wants to Draft Him,” *Time*, March 14, 2011, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/03/14/senator-tommy-lee-jones-a-texas-democrat-seriously-wants-to-draft-him/>.

her anti-war politics in particular. As a vocal opponent to the war, Sarandon's response (as Joan Deerfield) to her son's death while still powerful is more expected than Jones'. Thus, to see *both* of them break down—part of which is comprised of the realization, particularly for Hank, that the war in Iraq is unjust and has caused the country to be in distress—is important, as it works to illustrate how dire things have become as a result of war. Although *In the Valley of Elah*, more so than either of the other two films discussed, aims to convey its message via affect over all other methods, this affect is used to produce a cerebral response. Because the film doesn't overtly deal with the politics of the Iraq War, at least until the very end, and it never deals with them in the same heavy-handed way as either *Rendition* or the *Green Zone*, it is easy just to read it, like Schickel, as mainly an emotional drama.

One of the main ways that *In the Valley of Elah* triggers affect is through the evolution of the character of Hank Deerfield. All clues early on in the film position him as being a working-class, patriotic veteran who is not particularly likable or sociable—we see him engaged in manual labor; concerned as to whether or not the American flag is flown properly in front of the local school; and (via flashbacks) dismissing his son's phone calls expressing distress and fear over being in a war. As Deerfield and Sanders begin to uncover facts about his son's death and as he begins to lose faith in the institutions he once trusted, signified by small cracks in his tough exterior—his pants are suddenly not so neatly pressed, for example—the viewer is asked to feel the same bleakness felt by Hank and that permeates the entirety of the film. In fact, the viewer is pointed towards the truth before Deerfield is; the viewer notices that the color of one of

the soldier's car matches that identified at the crime scene while Deerfield is still of the belief that "You can't fight beside a man and then do that to him."³⁷⁹ Even though the viewer sees it coming, Deerfield's loss of faith is more poignant because of this foresight. Yet, just because the viewer is pushed towards an affective response, this does not mean that they aren't simultaneously being asked to consider and reflect on the cause(s) of these changes in the character of Hank Deerfield.³⁸⁰

In many ways, Deerfield's loss of faith is tied to the issues of generational difference present in both *Rendition* and the *Green Zone*. Yet instead of setting up older and younger generations as being in opposition to each other, representing a series of contradictory positions and outlooks, *In the Valley of Elah* suggests that the younger generation (sons) have been unduly influenced and conditioned by the older generation (mainly their fathers). Mike does not just inherit his father's duffle bag from Vietnam or his watch (which was given to him by *his* father), but Deerfield's understanding of the necessary masculine rights of passage—particularly that war and violence make a boy a man. When Joan Deerfield (Susan Sarandon), in learning of her son's death, accuses her husband that "Living in this house he couldn't have felt like a man if he hadn't gone," she directly makes the connection between not only masculinity and war or violence, but also connects this mythology to the older generation.³⁸¹ Deerfield's telling of the story of David and Goliath (who fought in the valley of Elah) to Sanders' young son, David, which occurs before Deerfield begins to lose faith in his old belief system, can also be

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ I wonder if the reduction of *In the Valley of Elah* to just its emotive, dramatic elements—something that I found in numerous professional reviews—is a way of not facing the reality of the subject matter? That it is easier to chalk something up as a "sad story?"

³⁸¹ Haggis, *In the Valley of Elah*, 2007.

read as a perpetuation of this generational mythology. To be brave, to be a man, is to conquer your fear, it is only then you will be able to slay giants. Because we later see Sanders telling the story to her son, it is to be understood that the perpetuation of such mythology is not solely the fault of an older generation of men—as a culture we are all complicit.³⁸² And, as the movie as a whole suggests, we all suffer for our complicity. This is best represented by the difference in *Deerfield*'s treatment of the American flag from the beginning to the end of the film.

As Hank is leaving for New Mexico at the beginning of the film, he notices that the American flag is flying upside down in front of the local elementary school, which—in line with the character traits already developed in the film to this point—he has to immediately stop to attend to. Showing the El Salvadoran maintenance worker how to properly fly an American flag, *Deerfield* explains to him that a flag flying upside-down is a distress sign, used to signal to others that the country is in a dire situation that it cannot get out of on its own. We return to this location at the very end of the film—after Hank has both lost his faith and realized his own complicity in his son's death.³⁸³ While in New Mexico, a package arrives at *Deerfield*'s home in Tennessee from his son, containing the flag flown by his squad in Iraq, which is now tattered and torn. Back in front of the elementary school, *Deerfield* not only has the maintenance worker hang this

³⁸² This is in direct opposition to interpretations of the film like Stephen Hunter's, which posits that *In the Valley of Elah* "strives to lay the crime it uncovers at the feet of a government that would send 200,000 boys off to a certain place at a certain time to do violence in the name of certain principles." Stephen Hunter, "'Valley of Elah' Spins An All-Too-Timeless Tale," *Washington Post*, September, 14, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/13/AR2007091302273.html>.

³⁸³ Hank is finally able to piece together the fragmented memories of phone calls with his son that have been haunting his memory from the film's beginning, coming to the realization that he ignored his son's fear, in an effort to push him to become a man.

flag—which when the worker suggests looks “really old,” he replies that it has just been “well-used”—but he has him hang it upside down, duct-taping the ropes to the flag pole and telling him that *this* is how the flag is supposed to be flown and just to leave it there.³⁸⁴



Figure 4: Still of Tommy Lee Jones and Joseph Bertót in *In the Valley of Elah*

As Douglas Kellner suggests, the American flag serves as “a symbol of the ship of the state...the crusty veteran has come to understand the immense crisis his country is in.”³⁸⁵

In the Valley of Elah suggests that as long as we actively engage in perpetuating a mythology that valorizes (and continues to engage in) violence and war, instead of true

³⁸⁴ Ibid. This scene is perhaps the most criticized scene in the entire film. James Berardinelli, in a review for reelviews.net, writes that: “The last scene of *In the Valley of Elah* may be the most ridiculously ham-fisted and over-the-top moment in all of 2007’s supposed prestige cinema,” referring to it as “blatant and cheesy.” http://www.reelviews.net/movies/i/in_valley.html.

³⁸⁵ Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 224.

freedom and justice, men like Mike will continue to be damaged and will continue to die. And as a country, we will *all* continue to exist in a state of crisis.

Out of the three films discussed, *In the Valley of Elah* was met with both the most positive and the harshest critical response. Harsh reviews tended to characterize it as being “a messy tangle...shot through a sheet of wet toilet paper” and “a movie that exists as a sermon for a position,” suggesting that in order to be good a film should have an ambivalent or neutral politics.³⁸⁶ Although not exclusively the case, reviewers who gave the film higher marks tended to read the film solely as a dramatic vehicle, a well-acted piece that was more about the emotional response to loss than war—ignoring the obvious fact that the emotional response to loss would not have occurred without the specter of war looming in the background.³⁸⁷ Even though neither *Rendition* nor the *Green Zone* received any of the same type of positive critical response as did *In the Valley of Elah*—not that either film is a cinematic masterpiece by any stretch of the imagination—neither were they met with anywhere near the same degree of critical vehemence, reviews of either of the two films from the far-right notwithstanding.³⁸⁸ I would suggest that this has to do with where/how the viewer is positioned in relationship to the overall message of

³⁸⁶ Stephanie Zacharek, “In the Valley of Elah,” *Salon*, September 14, 2007, <http://www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/review/2007/09/14/elah>; James Bernadelli, “In the Valley of Elah,” http://www.reelviews.net/movies/i/in_valley.html.

³⁸⁷ There are, of course, also stellar reviews for *In the Valley of Elah*, such as Owen Gleiberman’s review in *Entertainment Weekly*. <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20054819,00.html/>.

³⁸⁸ Besides claims of bad acting, silly plot line, and other such things, the worse the response to the *Green Zone* or *Rendition* got was that they came “too soon” after the events being depicted. But as Owen Gleiberman astutely points out in an *Entertainment Weekly* review of *Rendition*, “I can’t help but wonder if ‘too soon’ has become not just our explanation but our excuse — a knee-jerk justification for an America that has checked out on the promise of movies that delve into the issues of our time.” Owen Gleiberman, “Movie Review: *Rendition*,” October 17, 2007, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20152821,00.html>.

the films under consideration and the type of anti-war political position(s) being taken up by each film.

Both *Rendition* and *Green Zone*, although they provide a critical perspective on the War on Terror/the Iraq War, and can and have been referred to as anti-war films, they don't pose a threat to a sense of American National identity. In some ways, both films highlight and reinforce existing notions of what it means to be an "American"—both in terms of values and character traits—that are found in other cultural productions, including mainstream news media. Even though both films feature evil, malicious, cynical, or power-hungry Americans, they both provide clear counterpoint American figures that are more accurately aligned with popular notions of what it means to be American. The characters of Douglas Freeman, Alan Smith, and Isabella El-Ibrahimi in *Rendition* and Roy Miller in the *Green Zone* embody the quest for truth and justice, the idealistic individual fighting against corruption and evil and for rights and liberties (and winning), and who are inherently good and morally sound—all of which are and have been ways that American-ness has been and continues to be characterized. Thus, neither film truly threatens its (American) audience and instead, the heroes of the film can be read as potentially surrogates for the viewer—the real Americans. In an extension of this, both *Rendition* and *Green Zone* clearly articulate blame in a way that excludes the viewer—the guilty parties are *other* people—making identification with the film's victims easier. This is directly opposite from *In the Valley of Elah*, which makes the claim that all Americans are complicit in perpetuating cycles of violence and valor that lead to war and death (at home and abroad). Instead of older generations or those in

power needing to be changed, change needs to happen broadly for the benefit of society as a whole. It thus leaves viewers no way of extracting themselves from the current picture, so to speak.

The other crucial difference between *Rendition* and *Green Zone* versus *In the Valley of Elah* is the type of anti-war position taken in the films. *Rendition* and *Green* are not anti-war films in the sense that they are against war in general. Rather, they are against how the War in Iraq and the War on Terror have been carried out—they are critical of the ways war has worked at this current historical conjuncture, which is qualitatively different than being strictly anti-war. In the *Green Zone*, for example, Miller doesn't want to *not* fight wars—this is not what is at issue—rather, he is just concerned that the wars are justified. In response to Clark Poundstone's claim that, "none of it matters anymore" upon receiving Miller's own intelligence report, Miller angrily responds that, "Of course it fucking matters. The reasons we go to war always matter! It matters! What are you going to do the next time we need someone to trust us?"³⁸⁹ Thus, war can be justified—just not *this* war. Similarly, Douglas Freeman (and by extension, *Rendition* as a whole) is specifically questioning the efficacy of torture as a method of interrogation but this does not immediately equate to promoting pacifism. The ideology and justification of the War on Terror as a whole are not even questioned—rather just a particular policy and practice. War can be just, can have a positive outcome.

In the Valley of Elah, on the other hand, is more anti-war in a general sense. As Roger Ebert writes, "Those who call 'In the Valley of Elah' anti-Iraq war will not have

³⁸⁹ Greengrass, *Green Zone*, 2010.

been paying attention. It doesn't give a damn where the war is being fought...."³⁹⁰ Even though Ebert writes this in an attempt to de-politicize the film—he oddly uses it as a way to talk about learning things from your experiences—there is truth in this (decontextualized) statement. *In the Valley of Elah* doesn't qualify its anti-war position—we are never specifically told *this* particular war is bad or that there is such a thing as a *just* war. Rather, by presenting what occurs in the film as part of a cycle, passed down from generation to generation, *In the Valley of Elah* suggests that this issue transcends the confines of a particular war. This makes the film more progressive than most of the films in the War on Terror film cycle as well as more progressive than many of the anti-war celebrity organizations. However, it never suggests that the American crisis cannot be rectified.

In all instances these anti-war sentiments represent moments of political speech by the celebrities involved, serving as a means of disseminating an alternative narrative of war and war's repercussions. While the celebrities in these films are leveraging their cultural capital in the context in which we are most familiar with them, as actors in roles and therefore doing their jobs, these films explicitly broke from Karl Rove's list of ways that television and film could forge creative parallels to the official government-sanctioned war narrative. This break is sharpened by the fact that these are pieces of realistic cinema and often based loosely on actual events, instead of set in a fantasy world like the movie *Avatar*, for example.³⁹¹ While *Avatar* has an anti-war message that aims

³⁹⁰ Roger Ebert, "In the Valley of Elah," September 14, 2007, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070913/REVIEWS/709130304>.

³⁹¹ *Avatar*, DVD, directed by James Cameron (2009; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox).

to make parallels to the war in Iraq, and particularly the position that the Iraq War was a militarized resource grab, this message is cloaked in a fantastical world of giant blue humanoids.³⁹² It is easier to lose sight of the anti-war message while visiting the magical planet of Pandora with Sam Worthington than visiting the more familiar New Mexico with Tommy Lee Jones or even Iraq with Matt Damon (the visual landscape of which the viewer would be familiar with if they watched news coverage of the war in Iraq). This cycle of realistic war films and the celebrities who star in them are therefore markedly different than both other less realistically grounded anti-war films released concurrently and the ideologically synchronous films that were released during WWII. In this sense, these films serve as vehicles for celebrity political expression and particularly protest, functioning in a similar (but potentially more accessible and wide-reaching way) to the celebrity anti-war organizations discussed earlier in this chapter.

Limiting Speech, Limiting Democracy?

On the ten year anniversary of the war in Iraq *The Hollywood Reporter* published an article on celebrity anti-war activism.³⁹³ Tracking the numerous ways that “Hollywood Fought Against the Iraq War,” author Jordan Zakarin concludes the article with the simultaneously wistful *and* dismissive: “Long-known for its dovish tendencies and

³⁹² For more on *Avatar*’s anti-war message see: Anne Dilenschneider, “Avatar: An Anti-War Film Challenges Us to ‘Be All That You Can Be,’” *The Huffington Post*, November 17, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anne-dilenschneider/avatar-an-anti-war-film-c_b_420770.html; Huma Khan, “The Politics of ‘Avatar:’ Conservatives Attack Film’s Political Message,” *ABC News*, January 6, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Movies/politics-avatar-conservatives-attack-movies-political-messaging/story?id=9484885>; and Nile Gardiner, “Is Avatar an attack on the Iraq War?,” *The Telegraph*, December 12, 2009, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/nilegardiner/100019656/is-avatar-an-attack-on-the-iraq-war/>.

³⁹³ Jordan Zakarin, “How Hollywood Fought Against the Iraq War,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 19, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/iraq-war-anniversary-hollywoods-anti-429697>.

outspoken liberalism, it was in some ways to be expected that the industry would speak out; after the scandals of ‘Hanoi’ Jane Fonda in Vietnam and the country’s post-9/11 identification with a Texan conservative president, celebrities were heard but unheeded.”³⁹⁴ And returning to coverage of the 2003 Oscars, an article which appeared in the *Guardian* claimed that as “the bombs continue to fall in Iraq, tonight’s Oscars have been given a sober makeover by stars desperate to find a way of marrying their desire for publicity with their fear of alienating an increasingly peacenik public.”³⁹⁵ While calling the American people “an increasingly peacenik public” is perhaps a bit of the stretch—especially post-9/11 and then right after the start of the Iraq War—the directness of the political approach by celebrities, who were and are less easily dismissed as other protesters who can be written-off as representing a fringe position, might have been what was alienating. This might also explain the shift from celebrities’ participation in anti-war organizations to appearing in cinematic representations, which, while a degree more abstracted, were grounded in the same political ideology. There could be no questioning that the celebrity handling of the War on Terror was a *politicized* issue—even if the liberal democratic handling of it highlighted issues of truth, justice, and equality in language which hinted at universals. Such overtness runs counter to the depoliticization that undergirds neoliberal politics. And perhaps, increasingly, the seemingly non-threatening depoliticized approach to issues that is offered by neoliberal celebrity politics

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Amelia Hill and Edward Helmore, “Glitz out as stars ponder Oscar protest,” *The Guardian*, March 22, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/23/film.oscars2003?redirection=guardian>.

is what average citizen-subjects have become more receptive to or, at the very least, more comfortable with.

Chapter Three: The Ballad of Saint George or, Celebrity Humanitarianism—the Kinder Face of Neoliberalism

Meanwhile on the Hill...

As Seth Rogen made his pitch to a mostly empty and otherwise drowsy Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, actor Ben Affleck was also testifying before Congress. Invited to appear on a panel of Congolese experts (others invited included Senator Russell Feingold, former US Ambassador Roger Meece, and Raymond Gilpin, academic dean of the African Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University) speaking on the conditions in the African nation before a Senate Foreign Relations Committee and scheduled to attend private meetings with other political figures, including Secretary of State John Kerry, Affleck “delivered a message of curious optimism.”³⁹⁶

Affleck’s opportunity to testify as an expert on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was not baseless. It came first from the fact that Affleck was educated on the region—before choosing to focus his humanitarian efforts there he read widely on the DRC and spent time speaking with experts. Second, and related to Affleck’s education in the region, it came from his experience in-country—a large number of the newspaper articles on the actor’s appearance in the Senate make a point of specifically mentioning

³⁹⁶ Donna Cassata, “Ben Affleck harnesses celebrity to spotlight the Congo,” *USA Today*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2014/02/26/ben-affleck-harnesses-celebrity-to-spotlight-the-congo/5839049/>.

that he had visited the Congo nine times, with some elaborating further to include that Affleck had “even met with warlords accused of atrocities.”³⁹⁷ Finally, it came from his role as a co-founder of the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI), “an advocacy and grant-making initiative wholly focused on working with and for the people of eastern Congo.”³⁹⁸ In fact, his 2014 senate appearance was not the first time that Affleck was called upon to report on the DRC as a result of his experience and his serious dedication (seemingly evidenced by the creation of the ECI non-profit)—he had previously been asked to create a segment that aired on ABC’s *Nightline* in 2008 (and also wrote an accompanying essay which appeared on the network’s website), to testify on the humanitarian crisis in front of the House Foreign Affairs Africa Subcommittee in 2011 and the House Armed Services Committee in 2012, and he made the media rounds with House Armed Services Committee member, Senator Adam Smith, that same year.³⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Affleck’s credibility as an expert on the DRC was not unilaterally accepted—the actor faced a degree of ridicule from multiple directions. Before going to the Senate, Affleck’s advisory firm, WilliamsWorks, was turned down by the then GOP-controlled House of Representatives when they approached the House with the proposition of the actor giving a current report on the DRC; as one House Foreign Affairs Committee aide summarily put it, “People serious about resolving problems—especially

³⁹⁷ Asawin Suebsaeng, “Why Ben Affleck is Qualified to Testify to the Senate on Atrocities in Congo,” *Mother Jones*, February 20, 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2014/02/heres-why-ben-affleck-should-be-testifying-senate-about-war-torn-congo>.

³⁹⁸ “About ECI,” *Eastern Congo Initiative*, <http://www.easterncongo.org/about>.

³⁹⁹ See Suebsaeng, “Why Ben Affleck is Qualified...;” John Horn, “Ben Affleck testifies in Congress about war-torn Congo,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/dec/19/entertainment/la-et-mn-ben-affleck-testifies-about-the-congo-in-washington-20121219>; “DR Congo: Hollywood actor Ben Affleck inspired to rebuild,” *BBC News*, November 26, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-20493418>.

problems related to life and death—want to have serious conversations with experts and leaders in the field, not celebrities...”⁴⁰⁰ Some journalists also had a field day with Affleck’s upcoming Senate appearance; Jim Geraghty, correspondent for the conservative *National Review*, quipped that, “If a Congressman asks about his qualifications as a Congo expert, Ben Affleck should simply answer, ‘I’m Batman,’” and *Washington Post* digital foreign editor Anup Kaphle tweeted, “zzzzzz” in response to an article on Affleck’s upcoming testimony that appeared in Kaphle’s own publication.⁴⁰¹ However, those expressing such criticism and ridicule were in the minority and, in fact, Affleck’s credibility was more commonly reinforced (if not lauded). Senior Senator John McCain, directly addressing Affleck, proclaimed that: “your credibility is really remarkable due to the depth of your commitment.”⁴⁰² Articles coming to the actor’s defense also appeared, including one in *Mother Jones*, which claimed that unlike “some celebrity who just happened to open his mouth about a humanitarian cause...the Oscar-winning future Batman knows his stuff.”⁴⁰³ Affleck backed-up his claims, stating in an interview that while fame gave him a “special spotlight,” leading to “skepticism about actors, about entertainment advocates,” it was most important to prove that “you’re not a dilettante.”⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ John Hudson, “Exclusive: Ben Affleck to Testify Before Congress as an Africa Expert,” *Foreign Policy*, February 20, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/20/exclusive-ben-affleck-to-testify-before-congress-as-an-africa-expert/>; Emily Heil, “Ben Affleck set to testify in the Senate, but the House said ‘no, thanks,’” *The Washington Post*, February 20, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/reliable-source/wp/2014/02/20/ben-affleck-set-to-testify-in-the-senate-but-the-house-said-no-thanks/>.

⁴⁰¹ Suebsaeng, “Why Ben Affleck is Qualified...”; Anup Kaphle, Twitter post, February 20, 2014, 9:34 a.m., <https://twitter.com/AnupKaphle>; and Heil, “Ben Affleck set to testify...”

⁴⁰² Edward Rwema, “Actor Ben Affleck Testifies Before Congress as an Africa Expert,” *Voice of America*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/content/actor-ben-affleck-testifies-before-congress-as-an-african-expert/1860170.html>.

⁴⁰³ Suebsaeng, “Why Ben Affleck is Qualified...”

⁴⁰⁴ Cassata, “Ben Affleck harnesses...” Affleck is clearly more skilled at maturely (and smoothly) handling the media than Seth Rogen. This is probably a combination of age (Affleck is ten years older than Rogen),

Speaking to a “packed house,” Affleck attested to his passion for Congolese stability, claiming that, “Outside my family and my work, this is it. This is my legacy. This is the thing I will be identified with. I take it extremely seriously.”⁴⁰⁵ Despite being a well-known Democrat, Affleck aimed to be bipartisan, praising former President George H. W. Bush and Cindy McCain (wife of Senator McCain), suggesting that, “Our Republican friends have perhaps been better on Africa than my party.”⁴⁰⁶ Affleck went on to report on the successes of his ECI non-profit, which he tied to “community-based partnerships,” and, specifically, capitalism.⁴⁰⁷ Having successfully paired with Seattle-based chocolate company, Theo, which is now sourcing “tons” of its cacao beans from the eastern Congo region, Affleck said that they were working on a coffee deal next: “Now we have a window of hope in a place that has had a lot of war, a lot of conflict, a lot of suffering, basically no security sector.”⁴⁰⁸ For Affleck, capitalism and capitalist investment hold the key to security in the DRC, serving as the fundamental component for all other necessary changes in the region. This belief is also articulated on the ECI website, which states that “investment in creating income-generating opportunities...offers tremendous potential for creating security in the region and opens doors to improved health, education and a more just society.”⁴⁰⁹ While Affleck asked for

experience, better ‘handlers,’ and political aspirations (Affleck has considered running for political office on multiple occasions).

⁴⁰⁵ “DC Duel: Seth Rogen blasts senators for skipping his testimony; Ben Affleck plays to packed house,” *Fox News*, February 27, 2014; Cassata, “Ben Affleck harnesses...” While Affleck might consider his work in the Congo to be his “legacy,” an article in *Foreign Policy* referred to the actor as a “serial activist.” Hudson, “Exclusive: Ben Affleck to Testify.”

⁴⁰⁶ Cassata, “Ben Affleck harnesses celebrity...”

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Eastern Congo Initiative, “Economic Investment,” <http://www.easterncongo.org/about/advocacy/economic-investment>.

Congress to allocate funds for personnel and resources for the special envoy's office, this was to *supplement* the work of in-country non-profits, such as his own; now that these privately funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had paved the way, the most pressing work left to be done was diplomatic in nature, such as President Obama meeting President Joseph Kabila of the DRC. As Affleck made exceedingly clear, work in the region "isn't charity or aid in the traditional sense. It's good business."⁴¹⁰

As Rogen and Affleck were giving testimony on the same day, the difference in attendance between the two actors' Senate appearances did not go unnoticed by the media. When asked by reporters whether he (Rogen) or Affleck were the better advocate for his respective cause, Rogen is quoted as responding, "I don't know, does he live there?"⁴¹¹ An article that appeared on the website *Design & Trend* framed it differently, summarizing it as follows: "Politicians clearly like Affleck more than Seth Rogen—the comedian's Alzheimer's hearing was basically deserted, while Affleck spoke to a large and positively smitten crowd."⁴¹² The *Design & Trend* article of course suggested that the difference in reception lay not in subject matter but in *who* was advocating for the subject matter, completely ignoring the larger point about the form of such advocacy. While it may very well be true that Congress (and the general public) find Ben Affleck to be more generally likeable than Seth Rogen, this framing makes it easier to overlook the

⁴¹⁰ Tom McCarthy, "Bill Gates cast as Ben Affleck's heroic sidekick in lobbying for Africa Aid," *The Guardian*, March 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/26/ben-affleck-bill-gates-aid-africa-senate>.

⁴¹¹ "DC Duel."

⁴¹² Peter Black, "Ben Affleck Impresses Senate At Congo Hearing; Congress Politicians Loved 'Argo' Director's Intelligent Speech," *Design & Trend*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.designntrend.com/articles/11213/20140227/ben-affleck-impresses-senate-congo-hearing-congress-politicians-loved-argo-directors-intelligent-speech.htm>.

fact Affleck's advocacy was fundamentally different politically from the advocacy of Rogen. While Rogen's testimony was illustrative of single-issue, liberal democratic celebrity politics, Affleck's was more clearly a manifestation of a neoliberal celebrity political model, the contours of which I will outline below.

Defining Neoliberal Celebrity Politics

As the neoliberal moment is witness to ever-sharper delineations of the marketplace as constitutive of our political imaginaries, our identities, rights, and ideologies are evermore precisely formulated within the logics of consumption and commodification rather than in opposition to them.

Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee,
*Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times*⁴¹³

I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life.

Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*⁴¹⁴

As both of the epigraphs that began this section suggest, neoliberalism has become the dominant political model in the US, often to the detriment of other models; Brown (among others) argues that neoliberalism forecloses on the possibility of other forms of political engagement, particularly the possibility of liberal or social democracy. In particular, neoliberalism does so by diminishing the "ethical gap between economy and polity" that liberal democratic politics rests upon and attempts to maintain.⁴¹⁵ While a neoliberal ideology has not fully eclipsed other forms of celebrity political ideology, in accordance with this larger, national political trend, some celebrity politics have begun to

⁴¹³ Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee, "Introduction: Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times," in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* eds. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, 9.

⁴¹⁴ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, 30.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

articulate the ‘normative reason’ of neoliberalism—comprising a second model of celebrity politics. However, it is worth noting that most celebrities do not start from a neoliberal political ideology, rather that some forms of political intervention they take up are compatible with and have already been influenced by wider neoliberal trends in the United States.

At the broadest level, the neoliberal celebrity political model, as an extension of neoliberal politics more generally, centers on taking up domestic and international issues in a way that fosters and legitimates capitalism and the economic inequality upon which it depends.⁴¹⁶ In turn, neoliberal celebrity (hereafter referred to as NC) politics tend to favor the rights, desires, and well being of the individual over the social whole, a tendency that is mirrored in the favoring by NC politics of the private over the public sector. Accordingly, NC politics are not apt to believe that the state has a mandate to see to and maintain a functional social body. NC politics are fundamentally depoliticizing, framing the work of private individuals and organizations and the issues they attend to as apolitical, couching both instead in a language of moral and ethical imperatives. This framing in turn inflects the form of discourse in the public sphere. Both the privileging of privatization and the tendency towards depoliticization enable NC politics to make what would otherwise be a political or rational appeal to average citizen subjects almost entirely an emotional one; consequently, the celebrities involved in this model tend to draw on a well of affective potential (both their own and that of the general public) as the

⁴¹⁶ In turn, consumption is also advanced. It should be noted that while I am specifically attempting to define neoliberal *celebrity* politics, many of the things discussed in this section are representative of neoliberal politics more generally (and especially as they are manifest through celebrities).

solution to national and international crises and tragedies rather than solely relying on the state.

The clearest instantiation of the ways in which capitalism and economic inequality are created and defended by NC politics is manifest in the handling of issues centered on moral and ethical social responsibility, which within such a political framework tends to be lumped together under the seemingly ‘neutral’ category of humanitarianism.⁴¹⁷ Full of contradiction, NC politics, as Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings suggest, “convey boundless faith in a better world under construction while simultaneously embracing the status quo, lashing out at the ills of global capitalism, while at the same time representing and defending its triumphant possibilities and inevitable forward march.”⁴¹⁸ NC politics often appear outwardly altruistic—claiming to be interested in many of the same issues of justice and rights as liberal democratic celebrity politics. But such a politics works instead towards “institutional aggrandizement” and in the words of Ilan Kapoor “contribute[s] to a ‘postdemocratic’ political landscape, which appears outwardly open and consensual, but is in fact managed by unaccountable elites,” therefore only paying lip service to democracy and democratic ideals.⁴¹⁹ While NC politics do not fully embrace the broader neoliberal perspective that posits that the only justifiable state role is as a protector of individual liberty, especially

⁴¹⁷ For celebrities who identify themselves as more left-leaning the term “activism” might accompany humanitarianism, however the form of such political acts don’t vary greatly.

⁴¹⁸ Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings, “Introduction: Neoliberal Capitalism as the Age of Icons,” in *Age of Icons: Exploring Philanthrocapitalism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings, 4.

⁴¹⁹ Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The ideology of global charity*, 1.

as it relates to enterprise, such a political model does all but eliminate the understanding that the state has a social mandate to see to and maintain the welfare of the public.

Neoliberal celebrity politics minimize the perceived need of a strong state presence in the lives of its citizens. Within a neoliberal discourse, domestic and international issues are situated in such a way that it seems logical and natural for them to be attended to by private individuals and organizations instead of being the responsibility of the public or the state, which is depicted as “choking individual liberty and initiative.”⁴²⁰ Plainly put, NC politics work to reinforce the privatization of (what should be) state or public functions, with humanitarianism and a language ethics serving as essential components of this move. This is not to say that NC politics have an antagonistic relationship with the state or that they wish to do away with the state altogether. Indeed, NC political actors often have a rather comfortable and cozy relationship with the state, as evidenced by their appearances before Congress, for example. However, while celebrities might petition official state bodies for assistance with social causes, it tends never to be a *first* resort. Rather, the state, if necessary, serves to buttress the work of private individuals and organizations, often stepping in at the request of the private individual or organization. This reinforcing of a movement towards increased privatization in turn works to shift focus from the public good and notions of community towards that of individual responsibility and self-sustainability. Thus while NC politics might at times espouse a similar rhetoric to liberal democratic celebrity politics, in that both at their core address causes related to issues of human rights, civil

⁴²⁰ Fridell and Konings, “Introduction,” 8.

rights, and the public good more generally, this understanding of state responsibility (or lack thereof) in granting, enforcing, and protecting these rights, and the elevation of the individual over the social body as a whole marks one of the clearest points of deviation between the two political models.

The different conception of state responsibility in liberal democratic and neoliberal celebrity political models can easily be seen by contrasting the requests at the core of Rogen and Affleck's testimonies. Whereas Rogen clearly believes that the US government has a (heavily fiscal) responsibility towards the social well-being of its citizens, Ben Affleck's 2012 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee made it clear that he was "not here to ask for precious American tax dollars, I am here today to respectfully request you use the most important power you have, your collective voice as representatives of the United States of America."⁴²¹ Though Affleck requested some financial assistance from the government in his 2014 testimony, such support was to be *supplemental* to private funds supplied by NGOs and created through the enterprise of individual citizens of the DRC via their 'partnership' with American corporations and came at the request of the individual (Affleck) on behalf of the ECI (private organization). Affleck's testimony espoused a sense of optimism about the situation in the DRC, which is reflective more generally of the optimism typically found in neoliberal celebrity politics. As illustrated by Affleck's testimonies, the optimism of NC politics derives from faith that "major social problems...are assumed to be in the process of disappearing rather than becoming worse" and that nongovernmental institutions are best

⁴²¹ Horn, "Ben Affleck testifies..."

for delivering “universal social inclusiveness and empowerment” in the fight against said problems.⁴²²

While this chapter will certainly attend to the ways in which NC politics blatantly reflect the economic rationality of neoliberalism, it is especially concerned with the ways in which they work to further the depoliticizing tendencies of neoliberalism. While the depoliticizing tendencies of NC politics occur in a variety of ways, there appear to be three main (and often interconnected) forms. First and foremost, NC politics tend to frame issues in such a way that public discourse on said issues is all but removed. While many, if not most, of the causes taken up by celebrities should be understood as fundamentally political in nature—as, once again, they tend to fall under the rubric of issues of social justice, civil rights, and so forth—they are reframed as *apolitical*, best tended to by celebrities, who have been imbued with the necessary expertise to attend to the issue at hand strictly as a result of their celebrity status.⁴²³

As apolitical issues, they seemingly transcend partisan politics, or, at the very least, exist in a neutral space, doing away with the need for the debate that typically accompanies *political* issues—both as they play out within official governmental circles and within the public sphere. While Ben Affleck, for example, might be known most broadly for his Democratic Party politics—which are as equally ridiculed by members of the right-wing blogosphere and on Fox News as they are lauded by liberal media outlets

⁴²² Fridell and Konings, “Introduction,” 9-10.

⁴²³ Ilan Kapoor suggests that within a neoliberal political model humanitarian issues are situated as technocratic matters—in this case, the technocrats would be the celebrities, who are already positioned as skilled elites. By making these causes depoliticized, technocratic matters—and therefore unavailable for “public deliberation, disagreement, and conflict”—Kapoor argues that they are “thereby upholding both a top-down politics and the status quo.” *Celebrity Humanitarianism*, 3.

such as *The Huffington Post*—his humanitarian work with ECI is never broached in political terms, even though he is appearing in a political space.⁴²⁴ Stripping issues and causes of their inherent political nature—which is often complicated, divisive, and, for lack of a better word, messy—the neoliberal celebrity political model presents these same issues and causes as black and white moral and ethical problems to be consensually solved. Accordingly, Ben Affleck has publicly stated that his choice to intervene in the DRC was because he felt a “moral obligation.”⁴²⁵ By making it a matter of morals, Affleck’s sense of the necessity for action becomes unquestionable: who wants to be the person to call up for debate an issue that has been packaged as morally and ethically black and white? This form of depoliticization is further reinforced by the fact that “freedom (rather than justice or equality)” —the former two being the core concerns of liberal democratic celebrity politics—“is the fundamental political value” of NC politics and can be easily translatable into a language of morals and ethics, which in turn is often most succinctly reduced to good versus evil.⁴²⁶ In the instances where justice takes the forefront in NC politics, it is also subjected to the moral-ethical filter (which, first and

⁴²⁴ For examples of the ways in which Affleck is discussed by left and right media outlets see: Christian Toto, “Ben Affleck Says He ‘Probably’ Wouldn’t Like Someone If They Voted Republican,” *Breitbart*, December 9, 2013, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-hollywood/2013/12/09/affleck-not-friends-republicans/>; “Ben Affleck On Republican Actors: ‘I Probably Wouldn’t Like’ Them,” *Huffington Post*, December 9, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/09/ben-affleck-republicans_n_4413293.html; Corinne Heller, “Bill O’Reilly Weighs In on Islam Debate, Says Ben Affleck ‘Would Be Beheaded in a Heartbeat by These ISIS Animals,’” *E! News Online*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.eonline.com/news/586920/bill-o-reilly-weighs-in-on-islam-debate-says-ben-affleck-would-be-beheaded-in-a-heartbeat-by-these-isis-animals>.

⁴²⁵ Tim Teeman, “Why Does Congress Listen to Celebrities Like Ben Affleck?,” *The Daily Beast*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/02/26/why-does-congress-listen-to-celebrities-like-ben-affleck.html>.

⁴²⁶ Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, 51. While not an example of neoliberal celebrity politics, the rhetoric of the War in Iraq coming out of the Bush administration is an example of both the use of freedom as a fundamental political value and its translation into a language of morals and ethics.

foremost, stems from a particular, often privileged or, when applied outside of the US, Western subject-position).

The second way that NC politics are depoliticizing extends from the first: celebrities tend to focus on the most readily apparent aspects of any given political cause—typically those most easily captured by images such as those of starving children, neighborhoods destroyed by natural disasters, or injured bodies—redirecting public awareness and concern from primary issues such as the distribution of wealth, access to resources, and systemic neglect. While this focus is understandable to a certain degree, as these aspects are obviously those that are most visible (and therefore intelligible and easily decodable), it untethers causes from the bigger picture, including such a fundamentally important thing as an issue’s historical-political background. According to Ilan Kapoor, celebrity humanitarian relief, for example, is about the “spectacle...diverting public attention away” from any given crisis’s “long-term and structural causes.”⁴²⁷ Or, when the history and causes of an issue are touched upon by neoliberal celebrity organizations, they are either truncated or take some effort to locate. In either context, the result is the misrepresentation, mishandling, and sensationalizing of the issue. In this way, neoliberal celebrity politics play off of what Hannah Arendt referred to as a “politics of pity” wherein ideas such as history and structural causes are not only overlooked but, tend to serve as counterproductive to the goals at hand.⁴²⁸ As James Wan succinctly writes in an analysis of Bob Geldof’s Band Aid 30, “pity, after all,

⁴²⁷ Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism*, 3.

⁴²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. On the other hand, in *Distant Suffering* Luc Boltanski begs of the reader/viewer of suffering afar to stay focused on the present, as “To be concerned with the present is no small matter. For over the past, ever gone by, and over the future, still non-existent, the present has an overwhelming privilege: that of being real.” *Distant Suffering: Politics, Morality and the Media*, 192.

is a visceral, emotional and immediate feeling; and when something makes you feel sick to your stomach, how can you sit around scratching your head?”⁴²⁹ Urgency becomes the focus, the immediacy of the need for aid; people are dying *now*, so help *now*.

Finally, depoliticization occurs in and through the framing and visual depiction of individual celebrities involved in such a politics. While it can never be ignored in any political model where celebrities are involved, within NC politics the image of the celebrity body—instead of verbal or textual reference to the celebrity—becomes especially significant. This is because the image of the celebrity body—whether helping to rebuild houses in New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward or passing out clean water to children in Africa—always demands that the focus be on the celebrity body. The celebrity body is both the familiar and unfamiliar in these contexts: familiar because these are individuals whom we see regularly in the media we consume—even if we do not actively make a point of keeping up with many of these celebrities, we are familiar with them, we ‘know’ them—and unfamiliar because (outside of the film and television roles of some celebrities) we do not know them in scenes of real life crisis and tragedy. Celebrities are perhaps most conspicuous outside of the lives of privilege that through excessive media documentation we have come to associate them with. And because the celebrity body is most conspicuous in these instances, it can help redraw attention to crises, which, due to their regular frequency have become commonplace and easily overlooked. This focus, particularly of the celebrity body in the humanitarian act, also

⁴²⁹ James Wan, “Band Aid 30: The politics of Pity,” *New African Magazine*, January 13, 2015, <http://newafricanmagazine.com/band-aid-30-politics-pity/>.

“feeds into the neoliberal ideology of personal initiative and individual (heroic) effort and empowerment as a panacea for structural problems.”⁴³⁰

Celebrities both serve as ideal models of the neoliberal conception of individualism as well as perpetuate the virtue of individualism through their political activism. Equally important, such activism tends to be framed within spaces that privilege such an ideology of individualism—particularly mainstream media. Mainstream media’s privileging of an ideology of individualism can be seen in examples that include the preference for the personal narratives of celebrities, political candidates, or ordinary citizens over other forms of narrative in both print and televisual formats; the increased calls by television news anchors for the opinions of the viewing audience (identified as “you”); or the confessional-style interview, endemic to all reality television programming. The average citizen-subject can watch change ‘happen’ at the hands of these individuals, whose own power, privilege, and authority in these instances become erased from popular discourse through the act of humanitarianism. Or, in a stranger turn of events, power, privilege, and authority become framed as an obstacle the celebrity has overcome in order to solve global problems and instigate change—celebrity X is described as engaging in humanitarian work *in spite of* the glamour and material privilege to which he or she is accustomed.

At the same time, the focus on the ‘good works’ of individuals—in this particular instance, celebrities—can also serve to distract from the void (be it attention, aid, intervention, and so forth) that should, under social or liberal democratic regimes, be

⁴³⁰ Ilan Kapoor, “Humanitarian Heroes?”, in *Age of Icons: Exploring Philanthrocapitalism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings, 40.

filled by the state. The focus on the image of the celebrity, on the celebrity body, in some ways, also serves to absolve the ordinary citizen of ever having to actually *do* this type of political work, to engage in humanitarianism outside the comfort of our own homes, so to speak—while Ben Affleck might ask us to donate money, to buy coffee or chocolate that supports the ECI, or even just simply to care about what is happening in the region, he does not ask us to physically go to the region to help out. Because we are intimately familiar with celebrities, they can serve as our proxies in humanitarian missions abroad; there is not the expectation of our actual participation on the ground or in the field, so to speak, because the celebrity has done the ‘dirty work’ for us and as us, even if just by being physically present to bear witness. So while ordinary citizens might be compelled to *actually* walk in the footsteps of Beyoncé, for example, and spend time helping attend to children with cancer at a pediatric hospital in Haiti, they are neither explicitly asked to do so nor do they have to because through the visual documentation of her visit they can walk *as* Beyoncé. Rather, the only expectation of average citizen-subjects is that they help fund the hospital through the purchase of a BeyGOOD t-shirt—which becomes like a souvenir of Beyoncé’s, and thus our, humanitarian visit.⁴³¹ While it is true that non-celebrity organizations, such as the Red Cross, have always undertaken humanitarian efforts on our behalf, celebrities are distinct from these other organizations because of the relationship that an individual has developed with the celebrity and to the celebrity

⁴³¹ See: Kaitlyn Laurie, “Beyoncé Brings Back Her BeyGOOD Haiti T-Shirt for One Day Only,” *Celebuzz!*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.celebuzz.com/2015-08-19/beyonce-beygood-haiti-t-shirts-buy/>; and <http://www.beyonce.com/beygood-haiti-returns/>.

image. In this case, *who* is taking on the humanitarian effort matters as much as it does *that* it is being undertaken in the first place.

All three forms of depoliticization discussed above work to cultivate an affective response in the average citizen-subject. As Michael K. Goodman writes, the affective terrain created by such politics under neoliberalism is “designed to circumvent the slow politics of states, policy, and government regulations” by going straight to the average citizen-subject who is in turn “called upon to solve current and ongoing world crises directly through this market in emotions” from where they currently are.⁴³² Again this does not mean that within NC politics the state has *no* role or purpose whatsoever, rather that the state is not expected to take the lead role. Instead, the state is activated on behalf of the celebrity citizen. Thus, for example, many of the discourses surrounding NC politics, and particularly humanitarian efforts, focus on the agency of the powerful and influential celebrity leaving the safety of their homes to save the less fortunate both domestically and (especially) abroad—either in the role of a scout or because the state has been unwilling or unable to. The celebrity reports back to the rest of us, who are implored to engage in some form of affectively motivated response, such as signing postcards, writing letters, or following social media accounts. This affective dimension sometimes has a direct economic correlation, as we are asked to fundraise, donate money, or, as is more currently popular, purchase material items both as (part of) the solution and as signifiers of care. In the instances that this occurs it serves to collapse the affective and economic upon one another (where caring is to buy, invest, or donate), making them

⁴³² Ibid.

appear as the same thing. And, while implicit, it should be reiterated that celebrities thus not only focus on the most ‘spectacular’ aspects of a given cause but also help “construct the very boundaries of what it is we should be caring about and how we should go about doing this caring in an increasingly unequal world.”⁴³³

Using celebrity humanitarian efforts domestically and abroad as grounding, the remainder of this chapter will be an interrogation of the neoliberal celebrity political model as it plays out in the specific examples of the ways celebrities mobilized to ‘save Darfur’ and on imagery of celebrities ‘caught’ in the act of humanitarianism. Focusing on NC politics at both the individual and the organizational level, this chapter, like the previous one, will attempt to better understand the shape, function, and efficacy of such politics. With a particular interest in the depoliticizing effects of NC politics, including the apolitical framing of issues and the encouragement of an affective response, this chapter will attempt to tease out the ways in which this occurs. Considering the ways in which the celebrity and the celebrity body serve as a catalyst for an affective response to humanitarian crisis, I argue that such verbal and visual rhetoric, which rely on the familiar celebrity in an unfamiliar context, allows for celebrities to serve as an antidote to crisis fatigue (both images of crisis and otherwise). This perpetual interest in the celebrity redraws our attention to crises while at the same time it directs attention away from the historical and structural causes of these crises. Morality replaces politics.

⁴³³ Ibid.

Ending Atrocity One Celebrity at a Time

Why should Americans care about human suffering in Africa or anywhere else? ...preventing, suppressing, and punishing genocide is a moral imperative.

Senators Barack Obama and Sam Brownback,
Introduction to *Not on Our Watch*⁴³⁴

One of the perennial problems for humanitarian crises is that no one pays attention, and so these crises never get resources. That's partly a problem of the news media, especially television, and partly a problem of politicians who just aren't interested in distant problems that don't have quick-fix solutions. But celebrities carry a spotlight with them, and if they can use some of that glow to highlight the needs of Darfur, Congo or Chad, that saves lives.

Nicholas Kristof, "Angelina Jolie and Darfur"⁴³⁵

With a complicated history that includes, among other factors, drought and desertification (leading to a scarcity of natural resources), a population boom, complicated and conflicting notions of identity, and inefficient practices of governance in the post-colonial period as a backdrop, in early 2003 the Darfur region of Sudan broke out in a bloody conflict.⁴³⁶ Grounded in accusations that the Sudanese government marginalized the predominantly non-Arab, sedentary Darfur region of Sudan and failed to protect its people from attacks by nomadic pastoralists, two rebel groups—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—joined forces against the government. Omar al-Bashir's government in Khartoum responded with force, including sanctioning Arab militias, known as Janjaweed, to attack and destroy villages throughout

⁴³⁴ Senator Barack Obama and Senator Sam Brownback, "Introduction: When Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary," in *Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide*, xii-xiii.

⁴³⁵ Nicholas Kristof, "Angelina Jolie and Darfur," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2008, http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/20/angelina-jolie-and-darfur/?_r=0.

⁴³⁶ For more see: Ahmad Sikainga, "'The World's Worst Humanitarian Crisis': Understanding the Darfur Conflict," *Origins*, Vol. 2, Issue 5, February 2009.

Darfur.⁴³⁷ While the Sudanese government publicly denied supporting the militias, hundreds of villages were destroyed and millions of people were displaced as the Janjaweed engaged in at least a tacitly—if not officially—sanctioned ethnic cleansing.⁴³⁸

The crisis occurring in the Darfur region did not escape notice outside of the African continent. In December of 2003 UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland referred to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan as “one of the worst in the world.”⁴³⁹ By July of 2004 the US Congress had passed a resolution labeling Darfur a genocide, two months later former Secretary of State Colin Powell openly used the term, and by June of 2005 then-President George W. Bush publicly declared that the actions of the Sudanese government in the Darfur region “constitute genocide.” Bush’s declaration was a break with the position of the United Nations and some of the officials in his own administration who had “carefully avoided using the term to describe the violence and death in Darfur.”⁴⁴⁰ While

⁴³⁷ As Amal Hassan Fadlalla points out in her discussion of journalist Julie Flint’s reassessment of her Darfur reportage, of the “approximately three hundred thousand Darfurian Abbala (camel herders)” only about twenty thousand were recruited for the Janjawid militia. Most were unwilling to supply militia members in order to maintain relationships with non-Arab neighbors, which was seen as “more important than an alliance with an uncaring government hundreds of miles away.” Fadlalla, “The Neoliberalization of Compassion,” 213.

⁴³⁸ Colum Lynch, “Rights Group Says Sudan’s Government Aided Militias,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A63010-2004Jul19.html>; “Genocide in Darfur,” *United Human Rights Council*, <http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide-in-sudan.htm>. According to the United Human Rights Council, at the height of the Darfur crisis more than 100 people were dying each day, with roughly five thousand dead each month.

⁴³⁹ “Humanitarian Situation in Western Sudan Among World’s Worst As Insecurity Escalates, Says UN Emergency Relief Coordinator,” *United Nations*, press release, December 2003, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/afr784.doc.htm>.

⁴⁴⁰ Scott Straus, “Darfur and the Genocide Debate,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005 Issue, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/sudan/2005-01-01/darfur-and-genocide-debate>; Amy Goodman, “Bush Administration Allied With Sudan Despite Role in Darfur Genocide,” *Democracy Now!*, May 3, 2005, http://www.democracynow.org/2005/5/3/bush_administration_allied_with_sudan_despite; and Jim VandeHei, “In Break With U.N., Bush Calls Sudan Killings Genocide,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/01/AR2005060101725.html>. Based on a

the public discussion of the events occurring in Western Sudan, led by individuals such as Egeland, Powell, and President Bush, helped to increase the media cachet of the region through the use of such qualifiers as the ‘worst’ and through the application of the term ‘genocide,’ the increased attention resulted in little, if any, improvement; by 2007 3.5 million Sudanese were starving, 2.5 million had been displaced by violence, and an estimated 450,000 had died.⁴⁴¹

While willing to refer to the killing in Darfur as genocide, which as per the 1948 U.N. convention on genocide meant that the US had a commitment “to preventing such killings and punishing the killers if it deems a genocide is taking place,” President Bush was unwilling to commit troops or further monetary aid to the region as “our government has put a lot of money to help deal with the human suffering there” and an increase did not “fit our budgetary process.”⁴⁴² As a 2014 article in *USA Today* marking the ten year anniversary of the congressional resolution suggests, the Bush administration’s willingness to use the term “genocide” was in response to the Clinton administration’s deliberate refrain from using the term in reference to the 1994 tribal massacre in Rwanda, as they believed doing so would have required intervention.⁴⁴³ However, the State Department under the Bush administration had reassessed the U.N. Convention, deciding that the treaty did not “compel U.S. intervention...So the administration called Darfur

legal analysis of the killings that they conducted, according to the U.N. the situation in Darfur was “tantamount to crimes against humanity but technically not genocide.”

⁴⁴¹ <http://notonourwatchbook.enoughproject.org/>

⁴⁴² VandeHei, “In Break With U.N.”

⁴⁴³ Rick Hampson, “Whatever Happened to the Save Darfur Movement?,” *USA Today*, September 9, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2014/09/03/genocide-darfur-sudan-bush-powell/14678933/>.

genocide in part because doing so didn't mean it had to do anything about it.”⁴⁴⁴ Of course, while publicly speaking out against the genocide in Darfur the Bush administration was (somewhat secretly) allying itself with the Sudanese government as part of the US's larger War on Terror—including a CIA meeting with Sudan's intelligence chief (brought to the US in an executive jet) and a letter sent by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the Sudanese government “calling for steps to end the conflict in Darfur” while simultaneously also speaking of the desire to further establish a “fruitful relationship” with Sudan rooted in “close cooperation.”⁴⁴⁵ All of this occurred amid calls for non-intervention by various African leaders, such as those claims made by South African President Thabo Mbeki, who asserted that “the African continent should deal with these conflict situations...that includes Darfur...It's an African responsibility, and we do it.”⁴⁴⁶ It was both the Bush administration's recognition of genocide and the administration's lack of immediate action that resulted in the formation of domestic and international advocacy groups and humanitarian organizations focused on the Darfur region.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. Also, the US was currently at war in two predominantly Muslim countries. As *The Washington Post's* Michael Abramowitz points out, Bush saw his own hands as being “tied on Darfur, with the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, he cannot be seen as ‘invading another Muslim country...’” Abramowitz, “U.S. Promises on Darfur Don't Match Actions,” *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/28/AR2007102801704.html?sid=ST2007102801732>.

⁴⁴⁵ Ken Silverstein, “Official Pariah Sudan Valuable to America's War on Terrorism,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/apr/29/world/fg-sudan29>; “Bush Administration Allied With Sudan Despite Role in Darfur Genocide.” The *Democracy Now!* radio transcript is an interview with journalist Ken Silverstein, Africa Action's Executive Director Salih Booker, and New Jersey congressman Donald Payne. Silverman traces the U.S.-Sudan relationship pre-9/11,

⁴⁴⁶ VandeHei, “In Break With U.N.”

⁴⁴⁷ It should be noted that upon the findings of genocide, in October of 2006 Bush signed the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (H.R. 3127/S. 1462) into law, which ordered, among other provisions, legal and economic sanctions on the Sudanese government.

One of the earliest responses to the crisis unfolding in western Sudan was the Save Darfur Coalition. Started in July of 2004 as an outgrowth of a meeting organized by the United States Holocaust Museum and the American Jewish World Service, and “focusing solely on raising awareness and advocacy (not aid),” the Save Darfur Coalition was created as “a powerful movement of activists, faith leaders, students, artists, & genocide survivors to bring an end to suffering in Darfur and other areas in Sudan under attack.”⁴⁴⁸ While the Save Darfur Coalition gained momentum from its inception to 2006 within the Jewish and evangelical Christian communities, who were drawn to the “portrayal of Darfur as a genocide (raising comparisons to the Holocaust), and as one that was being perpetrated by ‘Arabs’ (perceived by many Jewish and Christian groups as a common ‘foe’),” their broader influence within the more general public sphere ebbed and flowed.⁴⁴⁹ By the Fall of 2004, evidence of their failure to capture the general populace’s interest for a sustained period of time was clear as media coverage of Darfur had already started to wane, with the obvious result being the decrease in potential for the Sudanese conflict to be at the forefront of the average citizen-subject’s thoughts.⁴⁵⁰ However, celebrity interest in Darfur as a worthy humanitarian issue by the likes of George Clooney, Angelina Jolie, and Matt Damon began to coalesce in 2006—roughly around the same time as the conflict began to see an escalation—which refocused public

⁴⁴⁸ Virgil Hawkins, “Creating a Groundswell or Getting on the Bandwagon? Celebrities, the Media and Distant Conflict,” in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?* ed. Liza Tsaliki, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteris Huliaras, 89; and “Homepage,” Save Darfur Coalition, www.savedarfur.org. The following year the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Committee of Conscience published Angelina Jolie’s trip to the DRC as an online gallery.

⁴⁴⁹ Hawkins, 89-90. The framing of Darfur as a battle between evil (Muslim) and good (Christian) was perpetuated outside religious circles, including by the mainstream media and many of celebrity humanitarian activists, and proved to be a particularly persuasive trigger in the post-9/11 US.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

attention on the region and increased participation in the broader movement to ‘Save Darfur.’⁴⁵¹ While George Clooney has arguably become the celebrity face of the ‘Save Darfur’ movement and was made a U.N. Messenger for Peace charged with traveling the world to raise awareness about the region, Don Cheadle was actually one of the first celebrities to engage actively with Darfur as a humanitarian cause of interest.⁴⁵²

The Save Darfur movement received its first real celebrity boost when, in early 2005, actor Don Cheadle became the first celebrity to visit the Darfur region. Accompanied by human rights activist John Prendergast—noted for being the former National Security Council Director of African Affairs under Clinton and the apparent preferred go-to for celebrities who want to be educated on Africa—Cheadle visited refugee camps in Darfur and eastern Chad along with members of Congress.⁴⁵³ Upon

⁴⁵¹ Or, as Tamra Orr frames it in *George Clooney and the Crisis in Darfur*, Clooney is some sort of “handsome and glamorous Hollywood star”-cum-superhero, where “Once Clooney was made aware of the crisis, he swung into motion and marshaled all the resources his celebrity afforded him.” 6-7. It perhaps should be noted that this text is part of a series aimed at children. However, even the website for Not On Our Watch credits Clooney’s appearance at the rally on the National Mall as helping to “kick off what has since become a powerful, global grassroots campaign,” even though it clearly existed as a movement before his involvement. http://notonourwatchproject.org/darfur_advocacy

⁴⁵² Angelina Jolie visited the region before Cheadle in October of 2004—however, this trip was made as part of her rounds as a UN High Commission for Refugees Goodwill ambassador and didn’t seem to garner as much attention as celebrity involvement post-Cheadle’s visit. George Clooney claims that he was inspired to become active in humanitarian work by Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, as ““Brad was very involved in the one campaign with Bono, and that’s where it started for me...” “George Clooney Makes Darfur Demands,” *ABC News*, September 15, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2448328>.

⁴⁵³ Representatives Ed Royce, Jim McDermott, Barbara Lee, Diane Watson, and Betty McCollum joined Cheadle. Orange County, California Republican Royce, the Africa Subcommittee Chairman, has been affiliated with other groups focused on humanitarianism/advocacy in Africa—most notably Invisible Children, which is focused on the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central Africa and its leader, Joseph Kony. Royce is listed as a “friend” and one of the organization’s “biggest heroes” on the Invisible Children website, particularly for the legislation he sponsored targeting Joseph Kony and letters he sponsored to President Obama on the organization’s behalf. See “Royce Initiative Targeting Kony Heads to President’s Desk: ‘Rewards’ Legislation Focuses on International Criminals and Worst Human Rights Abusers,” January 2, 2013, <http://royce.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=316059>; and “Don’t Stop Believin’ // Meet Our Friends in Congress and CAR,” *Invisible Children*, <http://invisiblechildren.com/blog/2014/12/15/cant-stop-wont-stop-meet-partners/>. Among his other activities, Prendergast “has the distinction of being the one who took Jolie on her first trip to Africa,” as

their return, Cheadle participated in a press conference on Capitol Hill with Republican Ed Royce and Democrats Jim McDermott, Barbara Lee, Diane Watson, and Betty McCollum, who had also accompanied Cheadle and Prendergast on their visit to the region.



Figure 5: Still of Don Cheadle from Capitol Hill Press Conference on Darfur

Relying on visual and visceral language to convey the necessity of governments and people globally to act urgently on behalf of Darfur, press conference participants

well as working closely with Cheadle and Mia Farrow on African issues. Tina Daunt, "George Clooney depends on 'Cuz'," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 2008, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-cause2-2008may02-story.html>.

described witnessing “tsunamis of violence” (Cheadle), “young children who lost limbs to janjaweed swords” (Royce), and looking “in the eyes of the girls who had been raped” (Lee).⁴⁵⁴ The term “radical Islam” and blaming “racial and religious extremism” for driving the killing were also included in the press conference by Royce, connecting Darfur to the larger War on Terror so that it was not strictly just another tragedy occurring in Africa.⁴⁵⁵ This connection provided another reason for people to care about Darfur—as all of the press conference participants made variously clear, people needed to be made more aware of what was happening in order to be moved to care, which would “make a difference to help save the people of Darfur.”⁴⁵⁶ As Congresswoman Watson made clear, “the press holds a very important role in informing the world of what’s happening in the region,” expressing her dismay at the meager coverage of the crisis in Darfur in the American media and calling out her hometown paper, the *Los Angeles Times*, for not even having someone there to cover the press conference.⁴⁵⁷ As part of Cheadle’s interest in Darfur was to “make it very hard for people to say, ‘I didn’t know about [the crisis in Sudan],’” this lack of press interest would have been especially bothersome. After the press conference Cheadle increased his public presence on the issue in the press, including co-writing an op-ed for *USA Today* with Prendergast.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁴ Matthew Pritchard and Jim Fisher-Thompson, “Members of Congress Censure Sudan on Continued Violence in Darfur,” *IIP Digital*, January 27, 2005, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2005/01/200501271848391ejrehsif0.2915003.html#axzz3p7xjLFUf>; Ed Royce, “Royce Statement on Trip to Darfur” (Press Conference, Washington, January 27, 2005), <http://royce.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=21702>; and Bob Baker, “Cheadle moves from set to world stage,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/feb/09/entertainment/et-headle9>.

⁴⁵⁵ Royce, “Royce Statement on Trip to Darfur.”

⁴⁵⁶ Pritchard and Fisher-Thompson, “Members of Congress Censure Sudan...”

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Baker, “Cheadle moves from set...”

“‘Never again’—again,” published on March 1, 2005, likened Darfur to Rwanda, opening with a story of a meeting between Paul Ruseabagina (on whom the film *Hotel Rwanda* is based) and President Bush in which Ruseabagina urged the President to take action as “Rwanda’s horror of a decade ago is happening again—this time, in Sudan’s western region of Darfur.”⁴⁵⁹ The op-ed goes on to provide five ways that the “world” has responded similarly to Rwanda and Darfur, including deliberately portraying “matters as more complicated than they actually are, in order to delay difficult decisions and bold action,” practicing “moral equivalency,” and “applying humanitarian Band-Aids over gaping human rights wounds.”⁴⁶⁰ The op-ed never attempts to contextualize the events occurring in Darfur. Rather than treat the events occurring in Darfur as the result of a confluence of historical events, the genocide was juxtaposed with (and found to be parallel to) that which occurred in Rwanda a decade earlier—with Darfur presenting as an immediate problem. The reader thus learns that “Rwanda’s horror of a decade ago is happening again—this time, in Sudan’s western region of Darfur,” collapsing not just one genocide on top of another, but one distinct African nation on top of another, even if unintentionally.⁴⁶¹ (Celebrities like George Clooney repeated this move in other instances; however, it was usually the Holocaust that Darfur was equated with,

⁴⁵⁹ Don Cheadle and John Prendergast, “‘Never again’—again,” *USA Today*, March 1, 2005, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2005-03-01-darfur-edit_x.htm. Cheadle was nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal of Hutu hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina in *Hotel Rwanda* in February of that same year—mere days before the publication of the op-ed piece.

⁴⁶⁰ Cheadle and Prendergast, “‘Never Again’.”

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

particularly with the invocation of the Jewish Defense League's slogan of 'never again.'⁴⁶²

By eliding the material causes of Darfur—removing the genocide in Darfur from the specific confluence of factors that led to it—as well as by collapsing one instance of genocide on top of another, the op-ed depoliticizes Darfur. Genocide is presented as something that has suddenly materialized, instead of being rooted in a complicated history made up of the interplay between geographical, religious, ethnic, colonial, and meteorological components (among others). As the op-ed quickly points out, “there is one major difference between Rwanda and Sudan: In Sudan, it is not too late to act.”⁴⁶³ The immediacy (and clarity) of the problem at hand also enables the presentation of a succinct and easily parsable two-part solution, which Cheadle and Prendergast suggested were “protection and justice,” which if “the world would just begin to move on these two tracks...the slaughter would stop.”⁴⁶⁴ In the process of depoliticizing Darfur as an issue, the op-ed also works towards depoliticizing the public sphere by replacing political language with moral language.

Clearly, the op-ed, like the press conference, works to elicit an emotional response from readers—describing hearing “story after story of mind-numbing violence...young children beheaded or thrown alive into fires” and using terms like “nightmare,” “horror,” and “slaughter,” which while likely accurate are more evocative than, say, “death” or “killing.” The use of emotive language in this type of circumstance

⁴⁶² See for example Clooney's speech before the United Nations Security in September 2006. “George Clooney Makes Darfur Demands.” Cambodia would also occasionally make an appearance as parallel.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

is of course not new, however, what is important is the way in which such language is leveraged to further de-historicize the situation in Darfur—stripping Darfur of both its context and complexity in one move. This is a tactic that is consistently reused in popular movements, with Invisible Children’s 2012 campaign to stop Joseph Kony immediately coming to mind as another example. While Cheadle and Prendergast are relying on some of the language of liberal democratic politics (most specifically the emphasis on humanitarianism versus human rights), their writing is more fundamentally grounded in neoliberal political ideology and the op-ed can be read as the blueprint for the publication of the book *Not on Our Watch* in 2007, which would also be used as the name of the celebrity-founded organization begun in 2008 (both of which will be discussed shortly).

Cheadle’s public advocacy around the issue of genocide in Darfur, which was lent a degree of authenticity due to his time on the ground in Darfur and, rather oddly, from his recent experience in the academy award-nominated role of Paul Ruseabagina in *Hotel Rwanda*, helped spur a revitalization of media coverage of the region.⁴⁶⁵ This revitalized media coverage, in turn, opened up the possibility that Darfur would be brought back into the forefront of the consciousness of the average (media consuming) citizen-subject. And, Cheadle’s early adoption of Darfur as a worthwhile cause—that he claimed had occurred because he had been sensitized to raise the issue of Darfur “because of the

⁴⁶⁵ Virgil Hawkins tracks spikes in media coverage of Darfur based on celebrity campaigning for the cause. ““Creating a Groundswell...,” 90-94.

similarities of what I just experienced even fictitiously with *Hotel Rwanda*”—also seems to have served as the catalyst for other celebrities’ interest.⁴⁶⁶

By early the following year multiple celebrities had also begun to become involved in the broader ‘Save Darfur’ movement, including Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, who donated one million dollars to charities working in Sudan, and Tony Bennett and Meryl Streep, who participated in televised public service announcements, where Streep delivered the tagline: “Don’t be distracted. Don’t turn away. Don’t be overwhelmed. Don’t be too busy. Don’t Delay. Darfur can’t wait.”⁴⁶⁷ Celebrity participation in the movement also developed into the creation of further celebrity-founded organizations, such as Not On Our Watch, using the platform afforded to celebrities to not just speak out about the genocide occurring in Darfur but aimed to compel average citizen-subjects to become emotionally invested in the cause.⁴⁶⁸ Before moving on to Not On Our Watch, it is worth turning to an episode of the Oprah Winfrey Show on Darfur and a rally for Darfur in Washington DC, as these two moments marked George Clooney’s ‘public’ entrance into the ‘Save Darfur’ movement. Clooney’s appearance on Oprah and his participation in the rally are important and worth mentioning because Clooney becomes

⁴⁶⁶ Amy Goodman, “Don Cheadle and John Prendergast on Their ‘Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond,’” *Democracy Now!*, May 3, 2007,

http://www.democracynow.org/2007/5/3/don_chedle_and_john_prendergast_on

⁴⁶⁷ Jane Sims Podesta, “Meryl Streep, Tony Bennett Launch Darfur Campaign,” *People*, November 22, 2006, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,1562131,00.html>.

⁴⁶⁸ Goodman, “Don Cheadle and John Prendergast on Their ‘Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond.” *The Onion* pokes fun at Cheadle’s role in *Hotel Rwanda* and his humanitarian activism surrounding Darfur in a video entitled “International Scandal: Don Cheadle Planned Darfur Genocide To Create Film Role.” <http://www.theonion.com/video/international-scandal-don-chedle-planned-darfur-g-14197>.

the focus of the Save Darfur movement—Clooney’s opinions about and framing of Darfur form the boundaries of discourse on the subject.

On April 26, 2006, George Clooney appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to share his experiences from a recent trip to Africa that he took with his father Nick Clooney, a former television anchorman and current freelance journalist. Dubbed by *ABC News* as “a real-life secret mission,” the two harnessed their combined cultural capital (the elder Clooney’s being his credibility as a news anchorman, the younger Clooney’s his celebrity) to obtain the access to speak with Sudanese families living in refugee camps and to see firsthand what was actually going on—in short to serve as witnesses. In fact, upon their return Clooney’s father suggested in multiple interviews that their role as “reporters” on this trip was a form of required witnessing, reiterating a common theme in the documentation of atrocity—particularly in regards to the visual image. In this instance, the two served as witnesses, standing in as proxies for the general populace with whom they would share what they saw.⁴⁶⁹ Clooney’s appearance

⁴⁶⁹ See “George Clooney Speaks About Crisis in Darfur—4.30.06,” *ABC News*, April 30, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/story?id=1907005>; Desmond Butler, “Clooney’s Docu on Darfur to Air Monday,” *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/11/AR2007011100837.html>; and Linda Kramer, “Clooney, Dad Speak Out for Darfur,” *People*, April 27, 2006, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,1187884,00.html>. For more on witnessing, atrocity, and visibility see: Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*; Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Matthias Christen, “Symbolic Bodies, Real Pain: Post-Soviet History, Boris Mikhailov and the Impasse of Documentary Photography,” in *The Image and The Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* ed. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas; Sharon Sliwinski, “Visual Testimony: Lee Miller’s Dachau,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 9 (2010); and Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Visual Testimonies of Atrocity: Archives of Political Violence in Guatemala,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 9 (2010).

on *The Oprah Winfrey* show reflects this role as witness, being given the title: “The Shocking Story George Clooney has to tell.”⁴⁷⁰

This episode would be the first of many times that Oprah Winfrey, an influential celebrity in her own right, would discuss Darfur in detail on her show and her decision to invite Clooney to come speak on the topic was seen as a move to use her “hour of power to promote a news-story that will make your skin crawl.” Similarly, Clooney’s appearance on the show was touted as “using [his] fame to help inform the masses about issues more important than what you should wear.”⁴⁷¹ Framing the discussion around Clooney as an eyewitness (and therefore expert) on what was occurring in Darfur through the footage that he and his father shot on their visit, the episode also served as the venue by which parts of *A Journey to Darfur*, the documentary film that emerged out of the trip, premiered.⁴⁷² This approach to Darfur made it about the experiences of the individuals Clooney spent time with (and thus, also the actor himself) rather than on Darfur as a global crisis, which I am referring to as personalization. While Clooney did not shy away from using the term genocide in his account, he was not interested in recounting the various causes of genocide but rather in fostering an emotional response from viewers towards the individuals affected by genocide.

⁴⁷⁰ The April 26th episode featuring Clooney was preceded the day before by an episode on child prodigies and followed the next day by one on sex between female teachers and young male students. Almost one month later (5/24/2006), an episode aired featuring Oprah Winfrey and Elie Wiesel touring Auschwitz together.

⁴⁷¹ For more on Oprah Winfrey’s celebrity power see Janice Peck, *Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*. “A Cause Worth Losing Sleep Over,” *Hollywood Scoop*, April 26, 2006, <http://www.hollyscoop.com/cause-worth-losing-sleep-over.html>.

⁴⁷² The short-form documentary was released in July 2007 by The Nostalgia Network, Inc. Clooney would also participate as narrator/expert later that same year in the full-length documentary, *Sand and Sorrow*.

A *Huffington Post* editorial evaluation of Clooney's Oprah appearance reaffirmed the actor's desire to personalize Darfur, claiming that the Clooney was "especially poignant about the helplessness of the victims he had met, stranded, homeless, hungry and abandoned."⁴⁷³ Such personalization of unstable and inequitable global power relations is clearly depoliticizing as it redirects the attention of the general public from systemic and historical causes to the spectacular and affective elements of a given crisis. This approach also makes it easier to understand a crisis like Darfur through a moral lens. On *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and in his other public appearances and interviews Clooney repeatedly used the personalization of crisis to frame Darfur as a moral issue. A *People* magazine article discussing Clooney's trip and subsequent domestic public appearances (which came out the same day as his Oprah appearance) transitions smoothly from discussing his interviews with individual Darfurians abroad to directly quoting him as saying "[I]t's not a political issue. There is only right or wrong."⁴⁷⁴ The personalization of crisis, making it about the individuals involved, can thus be understood as one of the results of neoliberal ideological practices like this type of celebrity humanitarianism, which Janice Peck argues that Oprah Winfrey has "had a powerful hand in valorizing and legitimating."⁴⁷⁵ Or, put another way, when public figures (including celebrities, reporters, and politicians) present Darfur (and other sites of humanitarian intervention) in

⁴⁷³ Jane Wells, "Thank You George Clooney (and Oprah Too)," *The Huffington Post*, April 27, 2006, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jane-wells/thank-you-george-clooney-_b_19921.html.

⁴⁷⁴ Kramer, "Clooney, Dad Speak Out for Darfur."

⁴⁷⁵ Janice Peck, "The 'Oprah Effect': The Ideological Work of Neoliberalism," in *Age of Icons: Exploring Philanthrocapitalism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Gavin Fridell and Martijn Konings, 66-67. Besides her own philanthropic/humanitarian work in South Africa, *The Oprah Winfrey show*, for example, was also the venue by which Bono's (Product) RED campaign had its US debut.

this way, it allows crises to be “interpreted through an ostensibly human interest lens which distils them down to a simplified narrative of heroes, villains and victims.”⁴⁷⁶

Four days after George Clooney appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, the Save Darfur Coalition organized a “Save Darfur” rally on the National Mall where “thousands of people joined celebrities and lawmakers...urging the Bush administration and Congress to help end genocide in Sudan’s Darfur region” and to impart “messages of activism, peace and responsibility to the crowd that gathered from across the nation.”⁴⁷⁷ The rally, which garnered a large degree of media attention (both as a result of the event itself and the individuals involved), served as an introduction to the cause on a more spectacular scale. While the stage was mainly populated by members of the clergy (in keeping with the Save Darfur Coalition’s religious roots), a contingent of southern Sudanese (few actual Darfurians were represented at the rally even though they had an active community in the area), and aid workers, the rally also featured appearances by Nobel Prize-winning author Elie Wiesel, then-Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi, then-Senator Barack Obama, Olympic medalist Joey Cheek, and George Clooney.⁴⁷⁸ According to various accounts, Clooney was the rally’s “big draw.”⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Abdul Mohammed, “Celebrity Activists: A Poor Imitation of UNICEF,” *African Arguments*, August 11, 2009, <http://africanarguments.org/2009/08/11/celebrity-activists-a-poor-imitation-of-unicef/>.

⁴⁷⁷ Will Bressman, “A Journalist’s View of the Darfur Rally,” *ABC News*, May 1, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=1909910>; “Celebrities, activists rally for Darfur in D.C.: National Mall protest meant to urge White House to act on crisis in Sudan,” *NBC News*, April 30, 2006, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/12531663/ns/world_news-africa/t/celebrities-activists-rally-darfur-dc/#.VYA0cabaTBB.

⁴⁷⁸ For a first-hand account of the rally, see Amal Hassan Fadlalla, “Neoliberalization of Compassion.” To see a more comprehensive list of ‘notable’ participants, see: <http://savedarfur.org/historic-rally-washington-dc-delivers-three-quarters-million-postcards-demanding-end-genocide-darfur/>.

⁴⁷⁹ See for example: Andrew Wiseman, “Thousands Rally to Protest Darfur Genocide,” *DCist*, May 1, 2006, http://dcist.com/2006/05/thousands_rally.php; “Celebrities, activist rally for Darfur in D.C.,” and Bressman, “A Journalist’s View of the Darfur Rally.”

News coverage of the rally included the actor's name in headlines, such as CNN's "Clooney, senators urge action in Darfur," attached images of him as he "stands alone and bows his head Sunday during opening prayers," and even provided an account of what he was wearing, such as *The Washington Post* who thought it pertinent that readers know he was "clad in a black T-shirt and khaki cargo pants."⁴⁸⁰ Clooney was, of course, also quoted in detail in media coverage of the event—as much, if not more than, other rally participants—allowing for the actor's opinion to be that most readily available to ordinary citizens not in attendance. As per multiple media accounts, standing in front of the gathered crowds at the rally, Clooney spoke of the failing policies of the United States and the United Nations and, addressing members of the crowd (and those reading news coverage of the rally) directly, declared "You make the policy. All of you here—you—all of you here decide what is right and what is wrong."⁴⁸¹

Clooney spoke of "tragedy fatigue" brought about by all of the killing and disaster Americans "see" in places like Iraq, Pakistan, and Nepal.⁴⁸² Darfur, however, was different, "this is genocide." Clooney couched his brief speech in a language of vague moralism, claiming that, "if we turn our heads and look away...we will have only history left to judge us," and that the only *right* thing for those in attendance to do was pick "up a

⁴⁸⁰ "Clooney, Senators urge action on Darfur," *CNN*, April 28, 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/04/27/darfur.clooney/>; "Celebrities, activist rally for Darfur in D.C."; and Elizabeth White, "Thousands Urge End to Sudan Genocide," *The Washington Post*, May 1, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/30/AR2006043000808.html>.

⁴⁸¹ Amy Goodman, "Thousands of Protesters Demand End to Darfur Genocide in Largest Public U.S. Outcry Since Conflict Began," *Democracy Now!*, May 1, 2006, http://www.democracynow.org/2006/5/1/thousands_of_protesters_demand_end_to.

⁴⁸² "George Clooney Speaks About Crisis in Darfur."

phone,” which he claimed “makes a difference. It always has.”⁴⁸³ After charging readers with the letter writing campaign, Cheadle’s op-ed ends on a similar note, stating that, “if we stand idly by and take no action to end this nightmare the blame will be shared by us all.” Three things occur in this move: the problem is set up as a moral imperative, a correct (or right) pathway to (at least begin) solving the problem of Darfur is laid out, and the citizen-subject is ‘empowered’ to work towards the solution by a show of care in the form of writing or calling.⁴⁸⁴ All three of these things work in tandem to help strip the issue of its inherent politicalness, as the issue is repeatedly articulated to be about “right and wrong,” eliminating the need for a rational or reasoned response. While clearly fundamentally an issue of human rights violation, and therefore political, there was a lack of a clearly articulated and sustained connection between Darfur and political action—including the ability of Darfurians to have political agency in working towards a solution. This is not to say that the Save Darfur Coalition and its celebrity supporters were not all ultimately in favor of military intervention in the region by the UN, United States, and other international troops; however such support tended to get lost in or collapsed into the overemphasis on morality and ethics—articulated as “taking responsibility” or “doing what is right.” This framing of Darfur by Clooney and others was, in turn, reproduced by the rally attendees who also fell back on a language of morality, ethics, and care.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ As Cheadle’s op-ed suggests, Rwanda was allowed to happen because “White House officials said they didn’t hear from the American Public.” Cheadle and Pendergast, , ““Never again’—again.”

⁴⁸⁵ This is not to say that empathy, for example, is always and only apolitical, as it can be an important starting point for political action. Rather I would argue that it is problematic when the step is not taken to move from a politics based on empathy to one that considers the historical, structural, and systemic dimensions of an issue.

According to *ABC News*' Will Bressman, for example, who was in attendance at the rally, based on the "earnest expressions on the faces of those gathered, and the high-wattage star power (needless to say, George Clooney is a large draw), one can get a sense of the tangible depth of the empathy and passion for ending this horror felt by everyone at the National Mall."⁴⁸⁶ And another attendee claimed that participation in such a rally was "the socially responsible, good conscience thing to do...It's an opportunity to show my daughter what people do when they care about something."⁴⁸⁷ The emphasis on *choosing* to take responsibility for saving the people of Darfur is important as to choose to do something instead of being *made* to do so enables the citizen-subject to occupy the high moral ground on the issue. This emphasis also echoes the media coverage of celebrity participation in the efforts to save Darfur (and in their participation in humanitarian causes more generally), where part of the heroic individualism of the celebrity is his or her *choice* to become involved in a cause, to care enough and be moved to desire to work towards change.

Yet, at the same time, this discourse of choosing to take responsibility elides the necessity of having to ever actually take responsibility in large part because of the over-emphasis on the importance of caring and on having an affective response to crisis as doing 'enough' to solve such a crisis. Also at fault is elevation of the celebrity as stand-in for average citizen-subjects—this is particularly true of celebrities who physically visited Darfur, as their work enables the rest of us to care our way to global change. And while remote disasters might never compel meaningful action from average individuals,

⁴⁸⁶ Bressman, "A Journalist's View of the Darfur Rally."

⁴⁸⁷ "Celebrities, activist rally for Darfur in D.C."

through the media's compression of time and space remote places are brought into contiguity with us. This in turn creates an affective relation that implies that we can help, when really—and particularly in this way—we cannot. Media coverage of celebrity humanitarianism is one of the ways in which this affective relation to tragedy is created and celebrities perpetuate and exacerbate it through a discourse that privileges the choice to care or be moved as a solution. This language of choice was not just omnipresent at the rally, but also appeared in celebrity interviews on Darfur, as well as in the *Not on Our Watch* book and in interviews and propaganda for the Not On Our Watch organization and the other celebrity organizations that grew out of it (such as The Satellite Sentinel Project).

In 2007 the book *Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond* was published. Written by Don Cheadle and John Prendergast (and with a Foreword by Elie Wiesel and an Introduction by Barack Obama and Sam Brownback), the book became a *New York Times* bestseller and was awarded Nonfiction Book of the Year by the NAACP. As in previous public statements by Cheadle, Prendergast, and other factions of the Save Darfur movement, *Not on Our Watch* is entrenched in (and indebted to) efforts toward Holocaust remembrance, encapsulated in this passage from the opening chapter:

We believe it is our collective responsibility to re-sanctify the sacred post-Holocaust phrase “Never Again”—to make it something meaningful and vital. Not just for the genocide that is unfolding today in Darfur, but also for the next attempted genocide or cases of mass atrocities.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Cheadle and Prendergast, *Not On Our Watch*, 6.

While *Not on Our Watch* attempts to provide some background to the genocide in Darfur, this is relegated to the third chapter (or roughly 20 pages). Instead, the book is primarily a mix of the authors' "heart-wrenching personal accounts of their experiences," which are interspersed throughout, and "the stories of extraordinary people across our country who are saying that genocide...should not be allowed to occur."⁴⁸⁹ The book concludes with two chapters meant to serve as instructional manuals to help the reader end genocide: "Strategies for Effective Change" and "Stop Mass Atrocities Now: An Agenda for Change." This all is mixed in with a heavy dose of (recognizably) religious language, such as the oft-used "Four Horsemen Enabling the Apocalypse," clearly catering both to the people already drawn to the Save Darfur movement while also attempting to highlight the moral framework by which Darfur was meant to be understood.⁴⁹⁰

Taken as a whole, *Not on Our Watch* works hard to personalize Darfur—much like Clooney's appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*—to make it about individual heroes (and victims) and not about concretely historical, collective, or global issues (contrary to the continual references to the Holocaust). This occurs in the text on four levels—with the narratives of individual 'victims' in Darfur, through the valorizing

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., book flap.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. For the curious, *Not on Our Watch* defines the horsemen as: ignorance, indifference, policy inertia, and apathy. While issues of ethics and morals are not inherently tied to religion, within the US the two are often conflated—especially in popular rhetoric. Religious belief and saving Darfur are explicitly tied together in chapter 8, where there is a section on "Interfaith Action," complete with "a prayer for overcoming indifference," (168-170). This section—like much of the book—brings the narrative back around to an individual level; quoting a member of a church in Bethesda the reader learns that "Being a part of this five weeks of worship for Sudan and Darfur has made a significant impact on my spirit and what I value as action...I confess that I was one that thought of change really only on a large scale...I've come into contact with the power of passion and the power of a few..." (170).

stories of successful activists, in the direct address of the individual reader, and with the ‘diary’ style entries of Cheadle and Prendergast. Chapter 7 of *Not on Our Watch*, devoted to “The Upstanders,” is an example of all four levels of personalization working within a single chapter; while larger organizations and collectives are mentioned, they are repeatedly reduced to their constituent components. Thus, the Save Darfur Coalition becomes about the work of individuals like Jerry Fowler (director for the Committee on Conscience at the U.S. Holocaust Museum) and Ruth Messinger (director of the American Jewish World Service); Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND) is about member Nate Wright; and the Genocide Intervention Network is about Mark Hannis and Stephanie Nyombayire. While the chapter is sold to the reader as being about collectivities working for change, it is composed of narratives of the heroic individual. STAND member Nate Wright, for example, is framed as “one of very few Catholic students” in a “conservative farming town where nearly everyone belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,” where he was “regularly harassed for wearing a cross to elementary school.”⁴⁹¹ Because of his experience with harassment, the text aims to set Wright up as the ideal individual to champion the plight of Darfurians, as even though he “escaped that environment by going to college at Georgetown, he didn’t forget about how it felt to be the target of intolerance.”⁴⁹² The text never, however, notes that there is a distinction between being harassed because of one’s identity and dying for it. Rather any experience of intolerance primes one to be sensitive to all forms of intolerance.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 135-136.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

The personal, diary-style narratives of Cheadle and Prendergast appearing throughout *Not on Our Watch*—most often bracketed off from the rest of the text by being printed in italics—serve a similar purpose, telling a tale of individual heroics, but at an enhanced level as the two are the books’ stars, literally and figuratively. It should also be noted that the words directly attributed to Cheadle and Prendergast are the means by which the narratives of Darfurians most often appear; instead of allowing the Darfurians that they interact with to speak for themselves—which, in this case, would have been made possible by at least transcribing conversations—the two men speak *for* them. Because dialog occurs in the voices of Cheadle and Prendergast, the various Darfurians who are represented in the text become a homogenized group. This choice of representation also serves to strip some of the agency of the ‘victims’ that the text seemingly wants to try to give back to them by giving them voice in the first place. In an entry attributed to “Don”—the two authors go by their first-names throughout the text further highlighting the importance of individual heroic subjects—for example, recounts an encounter with an elderly woman, sans an available translator:

*“Do you have any idea what she’s saying?” I ask.
“No. She looks pissed though.”
She does.
“Maybe she’s talking about what happened to her in her village,” John
adds...⁴⁹³*

Unable to understand what she is saying to them, they decide that maybe she wants “some payback and wants to tie one of us to that bed and set it ablaze,” both suggesting a fear or apprehension of the woman and applying an assumed presence of vengeance to a

⁴⁹³ Ibid, 71.

situation where it may or may not exist.⁴⁹⁴ The recounting of this exchange continues with Cheadle offering the elderly woman Prendergast as a sacrifice (“Take the white man,”), they are then called over by the translator to hear another woman’s story.⁴⁹⁵ Cheadle writes:

*I don’t know if I’m ready to hear. Reading testimonials in source materials is quite another thing from looking into haunted eyes and seeing scabbed over scars. Hotel Rwanda’s real-life star, Paul Rusesabagina, stands close by....I consider his strength and step under the awning of the lean-to for my education from Fatima.*⁴⁹⁶

The entry ends there, before Fatima’s story is recounted to the reader; while she might have a name, in this instance she is as voiceless as the elderly woman for whom Cheadle and Prendergast reproduced in their own words. In either case, they both serve supporting roles to the individual celebrity heroes—Cheadle and Prendergast’s stories of their interactions with both women are really just stories about *them* and *their* personal interpretation of the “way things are.”⁴⁹⁷ The narrative that aims to compel readers to want to ‘Save Darfur’ is thus that of Cheadle and Prendergast; the Darfurian victims provide the setting to the more significant (and familiar) unease, discomfort, and sadness of the two men.

In the attempts of Cheadle and Prendergast to proffer solutions in their text, *Not on Our Watch* is guilty of that which NC politics—and neoliberal politics more generally—is most often criticized for: applying “economic values, practices, and metrics

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Much of the tone of the dialogue in this text teeters on ‘mansplaining,’ to use a popular colloquial term. However, the specific serious topic matter would preclude that from ever happening.

to every dimension of human life.”⁴⁹⁸ Chapter 8, “Strategies for Effective Change,”

begins with a direct address to the reader:

You have the power to make a difference.

This is not just rah-rah, cheerleading pabulum. The cold truth is that there is little appetite on the part of any government, including the United States, to confront the Sudanese regime or other merchants of death and to take the necessary actions to bring these tragedies to an end.⁴⁹⁹

Official arms of the state—established as unwilling to intervene on their own accord (with the potential existing for some to be shamed and/or forced into acting by private individuals/organizations at some point in the future) —are deemed heretofore ineffective and, at least in this instance, bypassed. While some of the suggested “strategies” offered in the text are traditional ‘consciousness-raising’ style tactics—such as “educate yourself about Darfur and the world’s other most urgent crises,” “join/start prayer groups or promote interfaith events,” or “talk to your family, friends, and colleagues about these crises and what we can do to help end them”—as the chapter unfolds they increasingly take on an economic and affective dimension, suggesting advocacy, monetary, and consumptive strategies to effectively bring about change.⁵⁰⁰

The reader is encouraged to affectively respond in ways that include: writing a “blog to end genocide on leading blog sites,” “write a letter—save a life,” or to engage in “online organizing.”⁵⁰¹ Taking a more traditional, material route, the reader can

⁴⁹⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 30.

⁴⁹⁹ Cheadle and Prendergast, *Not on Our Watch*, 159.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 171, 192-193. The example of the Harry Potter Alliance, provided of online organizing is perhaps the most bizarre of the text, an organization which “seeks to motivate Harry Potter fans to take a stand against tyranny, genocide, global warming, and more, using parallels to the book series.” Accordingly, “inept political leaders become the Minister and Ministry of Magic, while the oppressive and tyrannical are

participate in fundraising for humanitarian aid organizations or “organizations that get at the root causes of the violence, so that endless appeals for food and medicine become unnecessary,” (if unsure of what the authors mean by this the reader is directed towards the Enough Project, which, coincidentally, was launched by Prendergast in the months leading up to the publication of the text), to “link to the organizations you support from your personal home page or your blog” (which ends up as combination of affect, self-branding, and straight economic support), or to call for divestment, in part, by researching “your investment portfolio to see if you have investments in companies that are targeted for divestment, and then pull your assets out of any fund that does.”⁵⁰² Finally, the reader is encouraged to “wear the cause,” by purchasing “t-shirts or green wristbands and give them as gifts,” where their desire for a solution to the problems in Darfur is both visible to others *and* they get a tangible return on their activism.⁵⁰³ While the eponymous organization that developed out of the text—which will be discussed shortly—does not have a shop on its website, Prendergast’s associated Enough Project does, where available for purchase are “the original Enough Project T-Shirt,” also worn by “artist & activist Robin Wright,” or the “artistic and eye-catching Raise Hope for Congo T-shirt” which is guaranteed to be “a real conversation starter.”⁵⁰⁴ Of course, it goes without saying that the purchase of the physical book in and of itself, available in

depicted as Voldemort and the Death Eaters.” Fighting for Darfur becomes a fight against Death Eaters and a fight for Dumbledore.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 172-173, 176, 190. Prendergast and Cheadle would go on to publish a second book, *The Enough Moment: Fighting to End Africa’s Worst Human Rights Crimes*, in 2010. In the list of “Celebrity Upstanders” on the Enough Project website Don Cheadle is described as “one of Enough’s most active supporters.” <http://www.enoughproject.org/about/celebrity-upstanders/don-cheadle>

⁵⁰³ Ibid. 171.

⁵⁰⁴ <https://enough-project.myshopify.com/>

paperback-format for \$14.95, is a means of consuming one's moral and ethical position on Darfur.⁵⁰⁵ Buying a shirt or wristband, examples of conscious capitalism, become a way to take a moral or ethical position on an issue in a way that does not place any extensive demand on the consumer.⁵⁰⁶ This is qualitatively (and quantitatively) different than divestment, for example, which could have real material consequences.

Not on Our Watch isn't solely guilty of applying an affectively grounded, economic filter to humanitarian activism. For example, Water.org, co-founded by actor Matt Damon, a non-profit attempting to deliver sustainable solutions to water and sanitation issues around the world by providing "innovative, market-based solutions" (namely grants and microcredit loans), exercises a similar approach.⁵⁰⁷ In their list of ways that average citizen-subjects can "be a part of our team," Water.org includes the following suggested ways to contribute: "compete for our cause" through athletic races and competitions, "honor someone special by giving the gift of water in his or her name" via e-card, following Water.org on various social media sites, "donating your voice" to the organization by allowing them to post "insightful, crisis-related content to your Twitter feed no more than once per month," and/or turning "your business into a company that cares by donating a percentage of sales or services."⁵⁰⁸ However, where Cheadle and Prendergast's text differs is in the personalization not just of the problem, but the problem-solvers as well. With every strategy that *Not on Our Watch* suggests,

⁵⁰⁵ It should be noted that an unspecified portion of the book's proceeds are donated to Prendergast's Enough Project.

⁵⁰⁶ For more on conscious capitalism, see: Lisa Daily, "Ethics Inc.: Ethical Commodity Formations and the Rise of a Conscious Capitalism(TM)" (PhD diss, George Mason University, 2016).

⁵⁰⁷ <http://water.org>

⁵⁰⁸ <http://water.org/help/>; and <http://power.water.org/>.

there are multiple examples of the strategy in action at the individual level, illustrating not just what the individual did (such as starting a production company to raise awareness or delivering a sermon on Darfur), but who they are through the inclusion of such personal details as one individual's cerebral palsy or another's Jewish heritage. Thus, while trying to lay out solutions to a global problem—many of which are and should be about working collectively—once again it is refocused at the level of the individual economic and affective actor. This is not to claim that collectives are necessarily superior to individuals, rather that the reduction of tragedies that would need some sort of collective effort to solve them to compartmentalized individuals is problematic.

In 2008, a year after the text's initial publication, the nongovernmental, humanitarian aid organization Not On Our Watch was created. Founded by actors Don Cheadle, George Clooney, Matt Damon, Brad Pitt, film producer Jerry Weintraub, and former Clinton staff member David Pressman, and with John Prendergast serving as the organization's strategic advisor, Not On Our Watch was intended to “focus on mass atrocities and gross violations of international human rights.”⁵⁰⁹ According to the “who we are section” of the organization's minimalist black and white website:

Our mission is to focus global attention and resources towards putting an end to mass atrocities around the world. Drawing upon the powerful voices of artists, activists, and cultural leaders, Not On Our Watch generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for the vulnerable, marginalized, and displaced.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ http://notonourwatchproject.org/the_issues. According to looktothestars.org, which tracks celebrity charity work, other “supporters” of Not On Our Watch include such celebrities as actors Adam Sandler, Christian Slater, Jennifer Tilly, and Scarlett Johansson, former pro-NBA player Charles Barkley, supermodel Cindy Crawford, and musicians Benji Madden and Kid Rock.
<https://www.looktothestars.org/charity/not-on-our-watch>

⁵¹⁰ http://notonourwatchproject.org/who_we_are. The organization's founders are essentially those involved with the *Ocean's Eleven* reboot—minus David Pressman, who a 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article

Clearly intending (at least initially) to take up the charge raised in *Not on Our Watch* to create a movement that, “can grow into something more timeless and relevant to the prevention of future mass atrocities,” Not on Our Watch branches out from just being about ‘saving’ Darfur, identifying (the country formerly known as) Burma and Zimbabwe as two other main “issues” or areas of concern.⁵¹¹ As in other instances, the history or background to the problems of the areas of their concern is severely truncated.

On the Not on Our Watch website, the history of the Darfur region from roughly 1956 to 2005 can not only be summarized in two short paragraphs, but can also be reduced to just two civil wars—both of which highlight the Muslim versus non-Muslim trope popular in mainstream news coverage. The development of this specific trope served two main purposes, both of which also connect back to the Western subject. First, this reductionist explanation of the conflict in Darfur came in the wake of the events of 9/11 in the United States (as well as terrorist attacks in London and Madrid)—appearing in a period of mounting anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. Thus, it was presented to a population already primed to be receptive to an explanation of genocide that had “innocent” non-Muslims dying at the hands of “barbaric” Muslims. Second, and connected to the first, this clearly raised the stakes for ending genocide in Darfur for Westerners and Americans in particular: inaction had the potential to cause a Cold War-

referred to as Clooney’s “consigliere,” responsible for helping Clooney and his father sneak into Sudan on their first trip and being the individual the actor relies on to “keep me informed.” Daunt, “George Clooney depends on ‘Cuz’.” In 2010, President Obama made Pressman the National Security Council’s first-ever Director for War Crimes Atrocities, charged with “coordinating and supporting the U.S. government’s efforts to respond to and prevent mass atrocities around the globe, from Darfur to the Congo, Rwanda, Burma, and Zimbabwe.” Sandra McElwaine, “Obama Hires a Clooney Confidant,” *The Daily Beast*, April, 13, 2010, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/04/13/obama-hires-a-clooney-sidekick.html>.

⁵¹¹ Cheadle and Prendergast, *Not on Our Watch*, 236-237; http://notonourwatchproject.org/darfur_current.

style domino effect of Muslim terror (first Muslims attack non-Muslims in Darfur, then somewhere closer to home) while successfully ending genocide in Darfur was striking a blow to this perceived Muslim menace— both of which neatly fitted into the greater War on Terror narrative. While the celebrity-fronted Save Darfur organizations rarely invoked the threat of Muslim terror in these specific ways, it provided a subtext that average citizen-subjects were well enough versed in to decipher on their own without needing explicit guidance.

At the same time, ample text is devoted to the current crisis in Darfur, using a present-tense voice, reminding us that as we read “refugees and IDPs *are* entirely dependent...and remain vulnerable to attack, murder, and rape” and “aid vehicles *are* being hijacked...workers *are* being assaulted” (italics mine).⁵¹² This type of language, as has previously been argued, clearly underscores the urgency of the problem. The histories of the problems in both Zimbabwe and (former) Burma are given a similar treatment, although both countries are accorded (slightly) more complicated histories than Darfur, they are by no means comprehensive. In both instances, the ‘now’ is what is actually important, trumping the ‘why’ or the ‘how.’ And this sense of immediacy—of acting over all else—is woven throughout all aspects of Not On Our Watch’s website, making it clear that immediate problems need immediate, active solutions—there is no time to rationally think things out. This urgency, as has been previously argued in this chapter, is depoliticizing in that it focuses on the spectacle of the crisis, diverting attention away from the more long-term systematic and structural causes. The trope of

⁵¹² http://notonourwatchproject.org/darfur_background_timeline.

the non-Muslim dying at the hands of the Muslim plays into this as it also serves to mask the more complicated causation of Darfur.

Partnered with the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, Oxfam America, and the UN World Food Programme, Not On Our Watch's activism takes a two-pronged approach consisting of international advocacy and aid in and to their regions of concern. Accordingly, the organization claims to target "mass media and international press, and engage world leadership" while also working to "mobilize significant funds towards emergency, lifesaving projects to protect those in harm's way." In both instances, Not On Our Watch puts itself in a position of distinction from official state entities:

We encourage governing bodies to take meaningful, immediate action to protect those in harm's way. Where governments remain complacent, Not On Our Watch is committed to stopping mass atrocities and giving voice to their victims.⁵¹³

While willing to interact and work with the state—and having the state exercise power—Not On Our Watch (perhaps inadvertently) situate themselves in a particular position of power, as having to be the ones to 'manage' the state and step in and take over when the state is not doing its job; that the above sentences appear immediately following one about the organization's generation of "lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection" makes this starkly clear.⁵¹⁴ Not On Our Watch, through their description of the problems on the ground in each country, also make it clear that these countries are essentially failed states, thus necessitating their intervention. Situating the states as such

⁵¹³ http://notonourwatchproject.org/who_we_are

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

is done in addition to making it clear that intervention from outside organizations, especially state-run, has not been allowed, further justifying attempts at problem solving by groups like Not On Our Watch.

This relationship between Not On Our Watch with and to the state via their methods of advocacy and aid is reinforced throughout the organization's website. In detailing the type of advocacy undertaken for each region, Not On Our Watch focuses almost entirely on the measures taken by its individual (celebrity) members—elevating the works of the heroic individual. Advocacy in Darfur is about the actions of Don Cheadle and George Clooney, providing a narrative of their specific accomplishments as they traveled “to the region on multiple occasions, led international delegations to lobby governments at the highest levels, and urged international bodies to take meaningful and immediate action to protect civilians, deploy peacekeepers, and reinvigorate the peace process.”⁵¹⁵ While not able to physically protect civilians or deploy troops themselves, the organization stresses that Cheadle and Clooney are in the position to ask others to do so. This positions the state as being activated by and working at the behest of the celebrity citizen. And inarguably, in the case of Darfur, Cheadle and particularly Clooney have definitely had some traction with the state—in so much as their celebrity has afforded them the type of direct access to plead their cause both to the media and the channels of state power responsible for making these calls (such as the President) that would not be available to ordinary citizens. However, Not On Our Watch does not acknowledge the fact that such access is attributable to the power and privilege that is

⁵¹⁵ http://notonourwatchproject.org/darfur_advocacy

attributable celebrity and instead suggests that this is evidence of the heroic individual celebrity's choice to use their "voice"—an option that they suggest is also available to ordinary subjects, again skirting the fact that George Clooney's voice is louder than mine or yours.

Similarly, Brad Pitt's ability to travel "to the Thai-Burma border to tour Burmese refugee camps and speak with Burmese civilians driven from the country by the crisis" and then returning stateside to "call on the international community to address the incredible hardships faced by these men, women, and children as they fight to survive" obviously has much to do with his celebrity status.⁵¹⁶ Or, equally obviously, that Matt Damon's celebrity enabled his trip to refugee centers on Zimbabwe's border with South Africa, and, more significantly, made it possible for him to participate in an informal press tour of sorts, engaging "media outlets, calling on the worldwide community to take action to address the worsening plight of the Zimbabwean people."⁵¹⁷

However, the ability to participate in such heroics is also extended to the average citizen-subject supporters of the organization, who are encouraged to "take action" as individuals by not letting:

...the world's worst criminals operate under cover of darkness. Send the message to Sudanese leadership that their crimes will not go unnoticed. Let your leaders know that they should stand up for human rights worldwide. The world is watching because you are watching.

This attempts to invest a type of power in the individual also attributed to the celebrity—namely that he or she can dictate the actions of others, including leaders—giving their

⁵¹⁶ http://notonourwatchproject.org/burma_advocacy

⁵¹⁷ http://notonourwatchproject.org/zimbabwe_advocacy

affective response (in this case, watching and speaking out) a sort of charged meaning. However, this power is clearly unequal to that possessed by celebrities and is strictly grounded in the small acts of affect, making it illusory in comparison to the political agency of celebrities—who are out on the ground or in the media spotlight, working for change.

As attempts at leveraging individual celebrity (and/or, to a lesser extent, individual citizenship, in the case of the organization's supporters) in state affairs have found varying degrees of success, Not On Our Watch also details the degree and form of aid they are able to give as a private organization, such as grants to build hospital clinics, providing access to safe water and food assistance, family reunification, and training community leaders to act as mediators. Through such documentation, Not On Our Watch is chronicling the ways in which they are performing public services typically allocated to the state—in essence, highlighting the way in which an individual organization (or network of private organizations) are taking on the role of the state, often to the benefit of government and intergovernmental organizations like the UN. This relationship of Not On Our Watch and particularly its celebrity components, who are always the highlighted advocates and aid givers, to the state is also reinforced outside of the organization in the public sphere through news coverage of the organization's acts.

When a cyclone hit the already politically-ravaged Burma (referred to in the article by its now current name of Myanmar), MTV News ran two stories, a day apart, that serve to reinforce this positionality of Not On Our Watch to the various state actors involved. The first story, appearing on the network's website on May 12, 2008,

wondered why celebrities hadn't tapped "their star power...to raise awareness and spur action to save lives," explicitly acknowledging the failure of the state (Myanmar) to help its own people while passing off responsibility for doing so to NGOs and, more specifically, celebrities.⁵¹⁸ The next day, MTV News ran a follow-up to the initial article, having apparently been made aware of their error in bemoaning the lack of celebrity intervention by "the good people at Not On Our Watch" who "read our story and emailed us some info." While repeating some of the basic facts about the cyclone, the inadequacy of the state, and the immediate need for aid that appear in the first article, this second article confesses that: "the group—founded in part by George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, and Don Cheadle—has given half a million dollars to Save the Children for emergency relief work in Myanmar (Burma)."⁵¹⁹ In one move MTV News both lauds private organizations over the state while simultaneously valorizing the heroic individual by taking the time to name the organization's members instead of just noting that it was a celebrity organization or something of that nature. Who the individual celebrities involved *are* matters because to be a celebrity is to be the opposite of anonymous—to be a celebrity, in part, is to publicly stand out from the group or crowd. While direct discussions of celebrity power and privilege might be avoided by humanitarian organizations and news media, because we already understand celebrities as 'special' they are particularly suited to advance neoliberal ideologies of privatization and

⁵¹⁸ Gil Kaufman, "Myanmar: As The Cyclone Death Toll Soars, Why Aren't Relief Efforts Bigger?," *MTV News*, May 12, 2008, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1587339/myanmar-as-the-cyclone-death-toll-soars-why-arent-relief-efforts-bigger/>.

⁵¹⁹ "George Clooney & Brad Pitt's Charity Steps in to Help Myanmar," *MTV News*, May 13, 2008, <http://newsroom.mtv.com/2008/05/13/george-clooney-brad-pitt%E2%80%99s-charity-steps-in-to-help-myanmar/>. This rapid response also exposes the diligent work of a good publicist.

individualism, which are in part grounded in a discourse of specialness. However, because celebrities are simultaneously special *and* familiar, which might seem paradoxical, they help to normalize these ideologies, making them everyday.

While still an active federally registered 501(c)3 charity and accepting donations, the “current situation” pages for Not On Our Watch’s own areas of concern haven’t been updated since November of 2012, even though the regions have not been ‘fixed’ nor are they frozen in time (perhaps most indicative of the lack of updating is the fact that Burma is still listed as “Burma” instead of Myanmar). And while the news/featured stories section of the organization’s website is still updated—most recently with a link to a CNN op-ed by Clooney and Prendergast, a link to a report on the Enough Project’s website on South Sudan from their Political Economy of African Wars series, and information and the link to win the chance to “join board member George Clooney at the Disneyland premiere of his new film, *Tomorrowland*”—this news is mostly aggregated, coming from the websites of other humanitarian organizations. These recent news stories tend to focus more on celebrities than the crises, suggesting that while the fervor surrounding the movement to Save Darfur, for example, has lost its luster with average citizen-subjects, the interest in the celebrities involved has not. Clearly, interest in celebrity has a staying power that transcends that of individual crises. And indeed, much of the celebrity energy that had been funneled into Not On Our Watch seems to have been dispersed to various other outlets and the actual organization’s energies to Clooney’s newest effort, The Satellite Sentinel Project. While I do not want to spend a lot of time on the organization, The Satellite Sentinel Project is worth noting because it serves as an example of the

neoliberal celebrity politics found in Not On Our Watch and other celebrity efforts to Save Darfur, just in a more focused and specific form.

Leveraging the access to channels of power afforded to him by his celebrity to further champion his fight against genocide, George Clooney had the opportunity to go before the UN Security Council in September of 2006. In this appearance he claimed that, “For some reason or another, we have been a step behind on every genocide from the Holocaust to Cambodia;” the Satellite Sentinel Project would appear to be his solution to this issue.

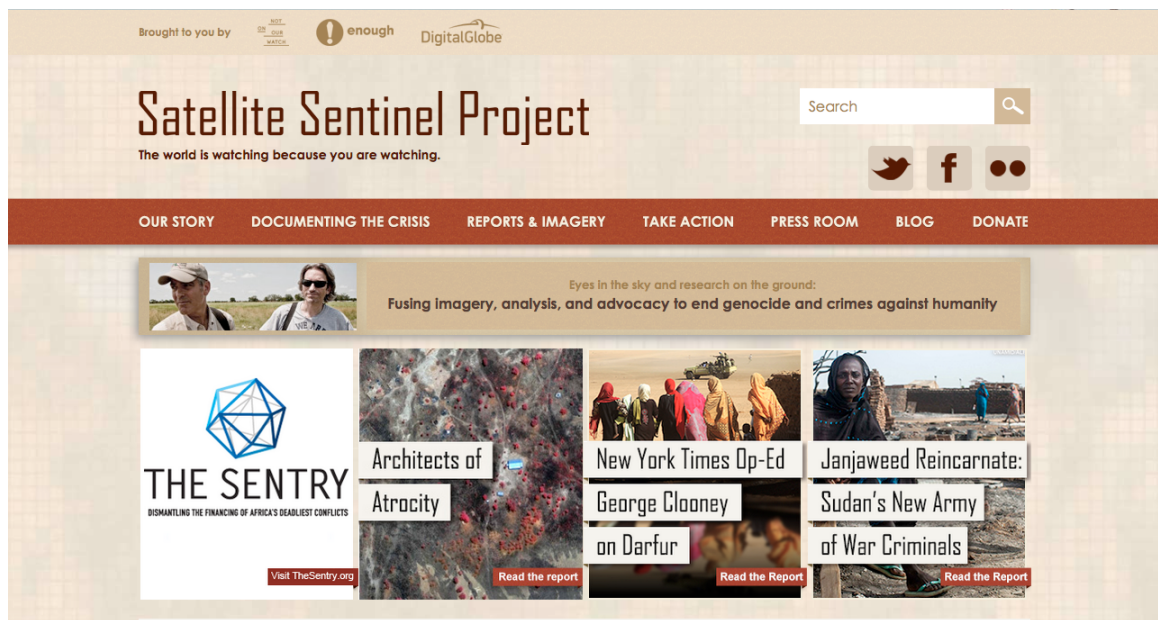


Figure 6: Screenshot of the Satellite Sentinel Project Website

Launched in December of 2010 as a joint-collaboration between the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, the United Nation’s UNITAR Operational Satellite Applications

Programme, the Enough Project (Prendergast's seemingly omnipresent nonprofit), and what *TIME* magazine termed "Clooney's posse of Hollywood funders" (most likely Not On Our Watch), the Satellite Sentinel Project's initial aim was to use private satellites to monitor troop movements in Sudan to serve as an "early warning system" of potential human rights abuses, if necessary.⁵²⁰ In an interview with *TIME* magazine right before the launch of the Satellite Sentinel Project, George Clooney framed their organizational aim as follows, proclaiming that, "We are the antigenocide paparazzi... We want them to enjoy the level of celebrity attention that I usually get."⁵²¹ This redirection of the one of the hallmarks of celebrity culture, the constant surveillance-style gaze of the paparazzi, to world atrocity is reiterated on the Satellite Sentinel Project's website, which asks: "What if we could watch the warlords? Monitor them just like the paparazzi spies on Clooney?"⁵²² This push for transparency and accountability—which can also be inferred is a trait of Clooney's, as he is the organizational figurehead—is coupled with a confidence in technology to help improve the world. No longer will 'we' be one step behind genocide and atrocity, thanks to "cutting edge imagery and data analysis."⁵²³ "Technological innovations" become a "game-changing" tool to end mass atrocity, highlighting a deep-rooted optimism in the capabilities of such innovations.⁵²⁴

As of May 2014 the Satellite Sentinel Project was no longer just strictly interested in observing Sudan and South Sudan in order to warn against human rights abuses and

⁵²⁰ Ibid; "What You Can Do," *Not on Our Watch*, http://notonourwatchproject.org/what_you_can_do.

⁵²¹ Mark Benjamin, "Clooney's 'Antigenocide paparazzi': Watching Sudan," *TIME*, December 28, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2040211,00.html>.

⁵²² <http://www.satsentinel.org/our-story/george-clooney>

⁵²³ <http://www.satsentinel.org/documenting-the-crisis>

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

would be “expanding its focus to undertake forensic investigations to reveal how those committing mass atrocities are funding their activities and where they are hiding their stolen assets.”⁵²⁵ According to George Clooney, in a speech delivered at the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity dinner:

We want to follow the money and find out how these atrocities are funded, who enables them, and what the smart tools are to counter these activities more effectively. Genocide and other human rights crimes are never just spontaneous events...Where is the money coming from and where is it being hidden? To the extent we can, we want to make it more difficult for those willing to kill en masse to secure their political and economic objectives, and we want to move the needle away from indifference and inaction.

This shift in focus on behalf of the Satellite Sentinel Project is a further illustration of the way that the organization embraces and has an optimistic faith in the power of technology to help attend to solving these global problems and thus indicative of an improving world. Technology enables the Satellite Sentinel Project to not just be one step ahead of genocide by being able to identify the tell-tale signs of impending genocide but, in a move reminiscent of the precognitive knowledge of the police officers in the Steven Spielberg film *Minority Report*, it will also give them the ability to identify those most likely to be responsible for genocide and other atrocities before they commit such crimes.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ “George Clooney Announces Expansion of Satellite Sentinel Project,” *Enough Project*, May 21, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/george-clooney-announces-expansion-satellite-sentinel-project>. The term “antigenocide” is a rather bizarre demarcation of positioning. One would assume that *most* people consider themselves to be antigenocide and therefore such a position would be an acceptable “given.”

⁵²⁶ *Minority Report*, dir. Steven Spielberg, (2002). The basic plot that drives the *Minority Report* is that in the future humans referred to as “Pre-Cogs” will enable police in Washington D.C. to eliminate crime through their special ability to see into the future and predict who will commit a crime before it even happens.

Operating completely independent of state and government institutions—they are now only partnered with Not On Our Watch (who processes all funding donated to the Satellite Sentinel Project), the Enough Project, and privately owned DigitalGlobe, who provides them with a “constellation of satellites”—the Satellite Sentinel Project is perhaps the epitome of the neoliberal political trend of privatization. The Satellite Sentinel Project claims the ability to identify “chilling warning signs” such as “elevated roads for moving heavy armor,” “lengthened airstrips for landing attack aircraft,” and the build-up of troops and munitions as well as provide imagery that “supports evidence of alleged mass graves, razed villages, and forced displacement,” all of which tended to traditionally be monitored by the military and other arms of the state’s defense.⁵²⁷ In taking on this role, the Satellite Sentinel Project puts itself in the position to share their intelligence *with* the state, not so much sidestepping the state altogether as identifying itself as better equipped for the task.

These abilities (and their associated responsibilities) are also extended to George Clooney as he not only is one of the organization’s founders, but also serves as the organization’s public face, making it seem as if *he* is first and foremost responsible for holding the world accountable for atrocity. Rather than some nameless organizational representative it is Clooney who goes on a “dream date” with a stranger to raise money, pens op-ed pieces for major newspapers and appears before international bodies, at various galas, and on television shows to talk about what he (and his organization) is

⁵²⁷ <http://www.satsentinel.org/documenting-the-crisis>

doing.⁵²⁸ Media coverage of the Satellite Sentinel Project works to reinforce this melding of organization and celebrity by all but erasing the organization in many of the headlines about the Satellite Sentinel Project, proclaiming variously that: “George Clooney Has a Real ‘Spy’ Satellite on Sudanese War Lords Every Day,” “George Clooney Turns Spotlight on War Criminals in the Sudan,” and that “George Clooney’s Africa satellites will track crime gangs.”⁵²⁹ And while some media coverage might choose to include satellite imagery, they all include pictures of Clooney (in various stages of rugged, intrepid humanitarian dress)—making it all but impossible to *not* make the association between the organization and the actor, if not forget altogether that there is an entire organization behind Clooney. The monitoring of the public good (or really, the monitoring of bare, physical life) and the morally charged job of witnessing is put squarely in the hands of George Clooney, a private organization and, by extension, its average citizen-subject supporters, whom are asked by the actor to join him in this duty.

Average citizen-subject supporters of the Satellite Sentinel Project are mobilized as part of an “early warning system.” Asked to follow the organization’s Twitter feed and to “Like” their Facebook page in order to get the “latest updates and action alerts,”

⁵²⁸ Julie Miller, “George Clooney Will Go on a Dream Date with a Stranger Next Month,” *Vanity Fair*, January 8, 2014, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/01/george-clooney-dream-date>; and George Clooney, John Prendergast and Akshaya Kumar, “George Clooney on Sudan’s Rape of Darfur,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/opinion/george-clooney-on-sudans-rape-of-darfur.html?_r=0.

⁵²⁹ Roger Friedman, “George Clooney Has a Real ‘Spy’ Satellite Watching Sudanese War Lords Every Day; Syria Next?,” *Showbiz 411*, September 28, 2014, <http://www.showbiz411.com/2014/09/28/george-clooney-has-a-real-spy-satellite-watching-sudanese-war-lords-every-day-syria-next>; David S. Cohen, “George Clooney Turns Spotlight on War Criminals in Sudan,” *Variety*, August 12, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/biz/news/george-clooney-turns-spotlight-on-war-criminals-in-south-sudan-1201280612/>; and Karen Hinderdael, “Imagery is everything; George Clooney’s Africa satellites will track crime gangs,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2014/0527/Imagery-is-everything-George-Clooney-s-Africa-satellites-will-track-crime-gangs>.

supporters are in turn given the responsibility to “spread the word and put pressure on public officials to respond...to help stop a war before it starts.”⁵³⁰ Individuals are implicitly being asked to redirect some of the gaze that would be aimed at Clooney towards atrocity, or, at the very least, to direct it at Clooney as he sets his own satellite-driven gaze on the Sudan, working to end genocide. And, because it has variously been pre-established that the Satellite Sentinel Project *is* George Clooney, it becomes easy to imagine that this request comes straight from Clooney himself and that participation will allow average citizen-subjects to at least symbolically work alongside the actor. This works to produce an empowered citizen-subject, special because of their connection to celebrity, which has in turn made them privy to and charged with disseminating morally significant information—such as the “human security alert” for the civilian population of the Kauda Valley in Sudan issued on the Satellite Sentinel Project’s Facebook page on April 15, 2015.⁵³¹ While not actually asked to monitor the satellite imagery for troop movements or abuses, average citizen-subjects are still asked to take on what would traditionally be the role of the state—in becoming part of the “spotlight” shone on the failures of the Sudanese government the individual takes on the state responsibility of surveillance.⁵³² This empowerment of the individual citizen-subject is hit home with the Satellite Sentinel Project’s tagline: “The world is watching because you are watching.”⁵³³ While other examples of NC politics don’t as explicitly rely on the visual in the way and

⁵³⁰ <http://www.satsentinel.org/take-action>. The exact same message is on the “what you can do” page of Not On Our Watch’s website.

⁵³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/satellitesentinelproject>

⁵³² <http://www.satsentinel.org/documenting-the-crisis>

⁵³³ <http://www.satsentinel.org/>

form of the Satellite Sentinel Project, visual imagery is equally fundamental to their functioning.

The Body Celebrity

Serving just as important a role to NC politics as verbal rhetoric is the celebrity image, or what can be thought of as the visual rhetoric of such a political model. Rarely does media coverage appear on a celebrity's humanitarian work without a visual component. The same is true of the websites tied to celebrity neoliberal political causes; Ben Affleck's image, for example, appears on the homepage of the Eastern Congo Initiative, Matt Damon's image can be found on the website for Water.org, and George Clooney's image appears at least once on the website for every humanitarian organization he is widely known to be associated with.⁵³⁴ Such imagery becomes both visual evidence of a celebrity's humanitarianism and part of the ideological work of neoliberal celebrity politics, functioning as visual currency in the public sphere.

Most obviously, such visual rhetoric reinforces the spectacular nature of celebrity in the general sense—most average aid workers don't have someone on hand to take multiple pictures of them in the act—while simultaneously reinforcing the reduction of complex geopolitical issues to personalized spectacle through such a focus. Celebrities are featured as being in deep conversation with those in need of aid or listening intently to victims' stories; handing out food/clean water/school uniforms to children or tending to the wounds of women and the elderly as makeshift nurses; or caught posing in the middle of a group photo with the needy, everyone smiling or making a silly hand

⁵³⁴ See for example <http://www.satsentinel.org/> or <http://notonourwatchproject.org/>.

gesture—showing that the celebrity brings a bit a joy to the beleaguered. These images—more so than any text—provide evidence of a celebrity’s good works.

Celebrities are also featured exercising their ‘power’ on behalf of the needy or pictured alongside those with official, state power—for example the ubiquitous images of George Clooney testifying before Congress on behalf of Darfur or Angelina Jolie seated alongside former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the 2005 World Refugee Day.⁵³⁵



Figure 7: Angelina Jolie and Condoleezza Rice

⁵³⁵ See for example: “George Clooney testifies before Congress on Sudan,” *CBS News*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-clooney-testifies-before-congress-on-sudan/>; and “Jolie, Rice, and Rusesabagina launch World Refugee Day events in US,” *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency*, June 17, 2005, <http://www.unhcr.org/42b303084.html>.

While celebrities are depicted alongside others with official, state power—suggesting an equality of power between celebrities and state officials—or exercising their own power, this power tends to be either depoliticized or, at the very least apolitical (above partisan politics). Jolie (framed as liberal by the media) is photographed with Rice (a member of a Republican administration); Ben Affleck (Democrat) is paired with John McCain (Republican Senator), laughing uproariously in a screenshot from a YouTube video where the two “Bust Each Other’s Balls.”⁵³⁶ This juxtaposing of liberal and conservative individuals clearly frames the issue as above and beyond traditionally political power and, in combination with the narrative that typically accompanies such imagery, makes it not so much about bipartisan cooperation—although it clearly serves as a point of unification and consensus between the parties—but as a moral imperative, it *transcends* mere politics. Images such as those of celebrities testifying before Congress or holding press conferences in front of the Capitol Building rely on the accompanying narrative typically provided by mainstream news media to do the work of depoliticization, which, as can be seen in some of the news articles quoted throughout this chapter, tend to favor the spectacle of a crisis over a structural or historical explanation of causation. On a related note is the actual figure of the individual celebrity body in the visual image, who by way of their status as a celebrity serves, even if unintentionally, to divert focus on that which might otherwise be potentially understood as *political* to being about the

⁵³⁶ Jolie is a registered independent, which has led some libertarians to claim her, like her father Jon Voight, as one of their own. However, Jolie’s politics are certainly more left-leaning and in line with other democratic celebrities. “Ben Affleck & John McCain Bust Each Other’s Balls,” YouTube video, 1:08, posted by “The Daily Conversation,” February 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTmHieL9uy0>.

celebrity—the celebrity becomes the center of attention with everything else serving as the background.

While there is little difference between the ways in which various celebrities are photographed when it comes to images that testify to a celebrity's power, it bears mentioning that photographs that evidence the celebrity's humanitarian work tend to differ along the lines of gender. Imagery of female celebrities tends to highlight maternal qualities such as nurturing, care, and tenderness. Actress Olivia Wilde is therefore shown as she "hangs at the Umoja Women's Village in Kenya," smiling and participating in the construction of handicrafts, Madonna is shown surrounded by Malawi children, actress Mia Farrow carries a young Darfurian boy, and actress America Ferrera is shown on the ground, playing a patty-cake style game with the children of sex workers in India.⁵³⁷ Male celebrity imagery, on the other hand, is more likely to focus on the gravity of his role as a problem-solver: George Clooney is pictured as the "feet-on-the-ground" activist, listening intently to older Sudanese men, for example, and Sean Penn is captured hefting a 110 lb bag of food-relief on his back in Haiti.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2012/sep/28/half-sky-turning-oppression-opportunity-women-worl/>; "Malawi accuses Madonna of exaggerating humanitarian efforts," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/11/malawi-madonna-exaggerating-humanitarian-efforts>; <http://archives.lib.uconn.edu/islandora/object/20002%3A859964297>.

⁵³⁸ Leonard David, "Actor George Clooney Using Satellites as Sentinels of Sudanese Rights," *Space.com*, February 1, 2011, <http://www.space.com/10734-george-clooney-satellites-sudan.html>; and "Sean Penn gives emotional speech as he accepts award for humanitarian work in Haiti," *NY Daily News*, April 26, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/sean-penn-emotional-speech-accepts-award-humanitarian-work-haiti-article-1.1067918>.



Figure 8: Juxtaposition of America Ferrera playing with Sean Penn working

While such visual rhetoric is not exclusively gendered in this way—female celebrities are shown in serious conversation and male celebrities are shown with children, for example—this tends to generally be the case. This is perhaps because ‘appropriately gendered’ imagery provides intelligibility to humanitarian work—which quite often occurs in foreign contexts—by presenting us with a recognizable point of entry. Suggestive of cultural universalisms—in so much as what it ‘means’ to be male or female transcends cultural differences—appropriately gendered imagery makes the foreign familiar. Ariella Azoulay believes that photographic statements depend on the recognition of the spectator to gain meaning, serving as a call to action for the citizen

public. In this case, the visual rhetoric of NC politics therefore helps make an affective response on behalf of the average citizen-subject who views such images possible.⁵³⁹

Race functions in a somewhat similar way—extending from a long narrative history centered around the white missionary going to help the darker-skinned other, celebrities of color tend to less frequently be depicted engaging in humanitarian work abroad. Don Cheadle, who clearly has been very active in the movement to Save Darfur and other humanitarian activism centered around issues on the African continent, is far less often pictured in Sudan, for example, or with African people than other celebrities engaged in the same/similar activities. A slide show on *Wonderwall.com*—a celebrity news and gossip website—titled “Don Cheadle: A Leading Man on a Mission in Darfur,” contains 4 photographs of the actor with a brief Q & A on his humanitarianism to accompany each slide.⁵⁴⁰ While the actor is depicted on the red carpet, at a microphone, and posing for a traditional headshot, not a single image shows him actually “at work” in Darfur. A Google image search for “Don Cheadle Darfur” produces a similar result—of the first 53 image results only two are images of Cheadle in Sudan, one is a still of the actor in *Hotel Rwanda*, and at least half are of George Clooney either alongside Cheadle at a press event or on his own on the ground in Sudan and among the Sudanese.⁵⁴¹ This suggests that whereas the depiction of celebrities enacting stereotypical gender roles

⁵³⁹ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Azoulay’s theorization of the way in which photographs are structured comes from Lyotard’s concept of *énoncés*.

⁵⁴⁰ http://www.wonderwall.com/movies/don-cheadle-a-leading-man-on-a-mission-in-darfur-13202.gallery?photoId=55573#!wallState=0__%2Fmovies%2Fdon-cheadle-a-leading-man-on-a-mission-in-darfur-13202.gallery%3FphotoId%3D55578

⁵⁴¹ https://www.google.com/search?q=don+cheadle+humanitarians&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAWoVChMI-vyLraXYxgIVQzqICh1dYwIz&biw=1432&bih=756#tbm=isch&q=don+cheadle+darfur

makes humanitarianism abroad legible by suggesting that these roles transcend cultural divides, race relies on the opposite interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar. In the case of Darfur, for example, when surrounded by black bodies George Clooney (a familiar figure) becomes foreign because of his whiteness—his unfamiliarity in this context makes him (and therefore the humanitarian issue) stand out whereas with his darker skin, Don Cheadle would, quite literally, blend right in.

This visual rhetoric of the humanitarian celebrity also clearly reinforces both the intended creation of affective terrain and the (associated) figure of the lone, heroic individual, full of initiative. While Susan Sontag, Barbie Zelizer, and others believe that the contemporary glut of visual imagery has served the role of normalizing atrocity (the concern of all celebrity humanitarianism, to one degree or another) and that habituation (be it in moral, technological, or political form) all “dull the linkage between what we see and what we attend,” it can be argued that the insertion of a visual signifier such as the celebrity does away with such over-familiarity, making atrocity and other humanitarian issues worth attending to, worth caring about.⁵⁴² Celebrities provide the antidote to the type of image fatigue that Zelizer, Sontag, et al. are concerned with. While we might grow immune to images of tragedy and atrocity, we have been primed to be perpetually interested in the celebrity image. Celebrities make (yet another) crisis interesting and fresh—making that which had become banal newly visible. The intention is that the average citizen-subject is moved to care, to have an affective response, not necessarily

⁵⁴² Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, 213; and Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 104-113. Both Zelizer and Sontag believe that images have served an important role historically.

because we *see* the symbols of crisis or atrocity (such as starving children or crying women) but because we see that the celebrity cares.



Figure 9: George Clooney and President Obama meet at the White House in 2010 to discuss Darfur

Most of this imagery—be it ‘on-the-ground,’ at the scene of atrocity or crisis, or in and among the powers of the state—hones in its focus on the celebrity in some way, shape, or form. In the above photograph, for example, it is George Clooney and not President Obama who is the star of the image. President Obama, out of focus with his back to the camera, appears to be pleading his case to George Clooney. Clooney, sharply in focus, is seated facing the viewer and with finger to mouth, is ready to consider the President’s

words. This image situates Clooney in a position of power relative to President Obama, who appears to be coming *to* Clooney for help. Pictures such as this serve to advance and perpetuate the trope of power of personal initiative and the heroic individual, pushing the need for real structural change to the side or doing away with it altogether.

A *Marie Claire* article/photo gallery on Angelina Jolie encapsulates the various ways that the visual rhetoric works in tandem with the verbal rhetoric of NC politics. While there are maybe two or three paragraphs worth of text in its entirety, there are thirteen photographs. The spread, entitled “Angelina Jolie: How She’s Become An Inspiration to Us All,” tracks the actress’s evolution into a “role model for so many,” who “splits her time between her extensive humanitarian work and bringing up her beautiful family of six.”⁵⁴³ Among these images, Jolie is pictured at the forefront of an image of aid workers in Chad—who remain faceless through the ways the images are cropped and therefore identity-less; smiling/listening/playing among women and children in Pakistan/Ecuador/Malta/Kenya/Bosnia; smiling and chatting with Haitians/Ecuadorians alongside husband Brad Pitt; and at a podium giving a speech while then-Secretary of State Colin Powell sits behind her in rapt attention. The accompanying text is a litany of Jolie’s humanitarian efforts as an individual, highlighting that “Ange” is “selfless,” “generous,” “devoted,” and “beyond admirable in her courage.” The article concludes by stating: “Bravery, elegance, generosity and poise—what an incredible woman!”⁵⁴⁴ While it is clear that the specificity of Jolie’s humanitarian works (there is never any context

⁵⁴³ <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/blogs/suzannah-ramsdale/543046/angelina-jolie-how-she-s-become-an-inspiration.html>

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

provided) are unimportant, the spread aims to make Jolie and her humanitarianism inseparable and worthy of emulation; the images and text combined reinforce that we—particularly as women—should also care about these same things (that is, if we want to be incredible.)

Conclusion

Clearly, neoliberal celebrity politics in the form of humanitarian activism do some identifiable good—it would be ridiculous to write off providing clean water, food, or even trying to be a spokesperson for a cause entirely, chalking it up to just being about increased exposure of the celebrity ‘brand.’ While celebrity humanitarianism certainly cannot hurt a celebrity’s ‘brand,’ in much the same way that being arrested certainly does not help, there are clearly easier ways to have a positive celebrity ‘brand’ than, say, traveling to areas actively engaged in civil conflict.⁵⁴⁵ Nor, for much the same reasons, is it fair to say that such humanitarianism only serves to advance institutional aggrandizement. While this chapter has largely been critical of the neoliberal celebrity politics that inform and help shape contemporary celebrity humanitarianism, this criticism has been made with belief that, at least in the realm of humanitarian intervention, there is little—if any—room for people to do much of anything else.

Problematically, however, this becomes a self-replicating loop— fatalistically, the neoliberal celebrity political model is presented as the only available option which in turn all but entirely forecloses on the possibility of celebrities seeking out alternative modes

⁵⁴⁵ Not to mention the fact that the various components that make up a celebrity’s brand—including the roles they take/music they make/etc., the type of politics they engage in, elements of their personal lives, and so forth—are not always (if ever) congruous.

for tackling humanitarian causes, thus also limiting the political possibilities being modeled for average citizen-subjects.

All of this is in no small part aided by the type of media coverage given to neoliberal celebrity politics and those that deviate from this model, particularly the liberal democratic celebrity politics discussed in the previous chapter. While celebrity anti-war activism was generally met with derision by the mainstream news media, celebrity humanitarianism does not receive the same type of umbrella negative response—even though both can be considered through the more general lens of ‘doing good.’ Take for example this quote from an article written on critics of Angelina Jolie by journalist Nicholas Kristof—who has himself since gone on to write a book and make a documentary on issues facing women around the world with female celebrities serving as ‘ambassadors’ for each issue—“So let’s lay off the snarkiness. Until we have an administration that cares about these issues, we have to accept moral leadership where we can find it—and that includes celebrities who care.”⁵⁴⁶ This type of laudatory speech is not atypical of the media coverage of neoliberal celebrity politics—as should at this point be very clear. In so doing it clearly perpetuates and reproduces depoliticization and a depoliticized citizenry (as celebrities are held up as models, ambassadors, and ‘moral’ leaders). Yet, these lines of demarcation between liberal democratic and neoliberal celebrity politics are increasingly being muddled by celebrity approaches to issues that attempt to blend the two political models, which I turn to in the next chapter.

⁵⁴⁶ Kristof, “Angelina Jolie and Darfur.”

Chapter Four: Hybrid Celebrity Politics are for Everyone!

From Us, For You

In July of 2015, actress-director-author Lena Dunham and production partner Jenni Konner announced their upcoming lifestyle email newsletter (the first of which came out at the end of September) via a post on Dunham's Instagram. Expressing excitement about Lenny (an obvious portmanteau of Dunham and Konner's first names), the post contained elements that spoke both to group solidarity and individual self-care, to the personal and the political:

We are so pleased to announce Lenny, the new email newsletter from @jennikonner & me. Feminism, style, health, politics: we will strive to bring it all to your inbox and to highlight unique voices. We sure hope yours is one of them. So get in bed with us at lennyletter.com...LYLAS.⁵⁴⁷

Online media outlets rushed to cover Dunham's announcement. *BuzzFeed*, for example, posted an interview with the actress about the upcoming newsletter, in which Dunham teased out what Lenny would be and who it would be for, stating that they wanted:

an army of like-minded intellectually curious women and the people who love them, who want to bring change but also want to know, like, where to buy the best tube top for summer that isn't going to cost your entire paycheck...people who have totally diverse interests.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Lena Dunham, Instagram Post, July 14, 2015, <https://instagram.com/lenadunham/>. For the curious, "LYLAS" is an initialism for "Love You Like A Sister." Dunham and Konner are the two largely responsible for HBO's popular series *Girls*.

⁵⁴⁸ Anne Helen Petersen, "Lena Dunham Is Launching A Newsletter For Young Women," *BuzzFeed*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/lena-dunham-lenny#.dl1ZWVN8K>.

Initially self-funded, Lenny plans to position articles on consumption (bracketed off as un- or non-political) alongside ‘deeper,’ political think pieces or, as *BuzzFeed* summarily put it, the newsletter will be “contemporary feminism for the inbox, in all of its contradictions and complexities. Clear and cogent pieces on the politicians who push for issues that matter to women, stacked above a monthly face mask routine.”⁵⁴⁹ While multiple articles covering the announcement noted that such a focus would not necessarily make Lenny unique (or really even distinguishable) from other women’s magazines or feminist websites currently available online, it has been generally suggested that what makes Lenny potentially different is that it will be “promoting and modeling a different type of feminist discourse,” making up part of a new rights movement.⁵⁵⁰ While the specific contours of said feminist discourse are unclear, most articles on Lenny seem to agree that it will be generative in nature and roughly center around equality, freedom of choice (in the broadest sense of the term, including the choice to wear “shorteralls”), and dispensing with inter-gender hostility.⁵⁵¹ However, in a list of seven topics that a *Refinery 29* contributor looked forward to having covered by Dunham and the editorial staff in the upcoming *feminist* newsletter, women’s rights was listed last—behind Caitlyn

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. See also: Claire Warner, “7 Life Lessons We Can Expect To Learn From Lena Dunham’s Lifestyle Newsletter ‘Lenny,’ Even if You’re Not A ‘Girls’ Fan,” *Bustle*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.bustle.com/articles/97242-7-life-lessons-we-can-expect-to-learn-from-lena-dunhams-lifestyle-newsletter-lenny-even-if>; Maeve McDermott, “5 things to know about Lenny, Lena Dunham’s new email newsletter,” *USA Today*, July 14, 2015, <http://entertainthis.usatoday.com/2015/07/14/5-things-to-know-lena-dunham-lenny-newsletter/>; Alanna Martine Kilkeary, “This is Why #LennyLetter Is Going To Be Your New Girl Power BFF,” *The Lala*, July 28, 2015, <http://thelala.com/why-lennyletter-is-going-to-be-your-new-girl-power-bff/>; and Caroline Pham, “Meet Lenny, Lena Dunham’s Forthcoming Feminist E-Newsletter,” *Good*, July 14, 2015, <http://magazine.good.is/articles/lena-dunham-lenny-newsletter>.

Jenner, ‘Squad Love,’ art, ‘real’ dating tips, food tips, and ‘pop culture appreciation,’ listed in order from first to last.⁵⁵²

Ultimately without really clarifying much, Dunham attempted to articulate how she understood the purpose of Lenny and how it fits into the field of contemporary feminisms: “With Lenny there’s no such thing as TMI, there’s no such thing as self-involved. We’ll be allowed to show the ugly and complicated thought processes that go into forming your own brand of feminism, and your own identity, because it’s not all clean back here.”⁵⁵³ And, it should be added, while the desire is for female (and feminist) inclusivity—as Dunham has made clear, Lenny is not just for “straight, white cisgender women” like herself—it is also unmistakably aimed at Dunham’s millennial peers, who one can probably safely assume make up the majority of her fan base.⁵⁵⁴ And, however vague the definition of Lenny’s feminism given by its founder might be, its mere potentiality resonated with said fan base, as evidenced by the reaction of Dunham’s social media following.

⁵⁵² Erin Donnelly, “7 Topics We Want Lena Dunham’s Lenny Newsletter To Cover,” *Refinery 29*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.refinery29.com/2015/07/90765/lena-dunham-lenny-newsletter-topics>.

⁵⁵³ Petersen, “Lena Dunham is Launching...” Of course, as the first few installments of the newsletter appeared in inboxes, it became clear that while there was room for flexibility in terms lifestyle choices—for example, what you think about the “Denim Explosion,” whether or not you choose to get a “Vajacial” (which is, as it sounds, a facial-like treatment for your vagina), or how you negotiate the terms of your maternity leave—the brand of feminism being pitched is a rather white, liberal feminism. The leading article in the first issue, for example, was a gushing interview between Dunham and Hillary Clinton and two weeks later one between Dunham and Gloria Steinem, who, when asked what she needed to “wear when you need to feel like you’re the queen of business and a rad bitch” listed, along with normal articles of clothing, “A concha belt. Something that’s Native American or Indian, or something that has a resonance from the past before patriarchy came along.” Lena Dunham, “The Hillary Clinton Interview,” *Lenny*, Letter No. 1, September 29, 2015; and Dunham, “The Lenny Interview: Gloria Steinem,” *Lenny*, October 16, 2015, Friday Interview.

⁵⁵⁴ Jessica Roy, “Lena Dunham Tries to Cement Her Guru Status,” *The Cut*, July 14, 2014, <http://nymag.com/thecut/2015/07/lena-dunham-is-launching-a-newsletter.html>. The term ‘cisgender,’ added to the Oxford English Dictionary in June 2015, is defined as “Denoting or relating to someone whose sense of personal identity corresponds with the gender assigned to them at birth.” http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/cisgender.

Dunham has 1.9 million followers on Instagram, of which 13,100 ‘liked’ the post announcing the upcoming Lenny newsletter, and 988 voiced their support in the comments of the post. It seems worth noting that Dunham’s fans generally perceive her as emblematic of young feminist authenticity—images of Dunham in various stages of put-togetherness are a regular on the actress’ Instagram and the commentary for such imagery by her fans is simultaneously idolatrous and expresses identification with a woman they see as being who they are or could be, a move also reiterated by female writers on other websites, such as *Bustle*’s Claire Warner who referred to Dunham as her “wannabe BFF.”⁵⁵⁵ Lenny becomes both a manifestation of the Dunham brand and a way for followers to similarly brand themselves through social media. This branding was enabled by the creation of a Lenny Facebook page and Instagram shortly after the newsletter’s announcement; the Facebook page has been ‘liked’ by almost 12,000 people and within hours the Instagram page had over 9,000 followers (and by the start of September had 82,800).⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ Numbers culled from Dunham’s Instagram page: <https://instagram.com/lenadunham/>. Warner, “7 Life Lessons We Can Expect to Learn.” For those readers unfamiliar with Dunham, she is neither particularly body conscious nor stereotypically celebrity thin, which speaks to her fan-base who, for example, see her as having ‘cojones’ for posting a photograph of herself running in a spandex outfit and who zealously defend the actress from negative commentary body related or otherwise. It should be noted that Dunham is also outspoken and can be abrasive, which has gained her a seemingly equal number of not just detractors but individuals who come across as having a visceral hatred of the actress. Probably not unrelated, plans are already in the works for Lenny to eventually transform into a newsletter-website hybrid in which a traditional comments section will not be included.

⁵⁵⁶ See: “Lena Dunham Launches ‘Lenny Letter’ Newsletter,” *Makers*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.makers.com/blog/lena-dunham-lenny-letter-newsletter>; <https://instagram.com/lennyletter/>; and <https://www.facebook.com/lennyletter>.



Figure 10: Fan-created image of Lena Dunham as Rosie the Riveter

Fans began using the hashtag #LennyLetter on social media sites to show that they signed up for and support the newsletter and its purpose. #LennyLetter has also been used to tag images of Dunham (including one where Dunham's face has been superimposed over the iconic Rosie the Riveter/"We Can Do It" image) and to denote posts of anything the individual identified as vaguely feminist: ranging from inspirational quotes to images of Solange Knowles to (most bizarrely) multiple posts related to the dentist who shot Cecil

the lion in Zimbabwe.⁵⁵⁷ However mundane or trivial an image of a woman wearing her ‘favorite’ facemask might be, it is transformed into a source of individual female empowerment (in this specific example, “self-care”), community, and collective empowerment—where the subject in the facemask is lauded for being “relatable,” women share their favorite face masks, and the Lenny project as a whole can be thanked for making an individual feel “less lonely.”⁵⁵⁸

This sense of creating and enabling collective empowerment and community at the behest of and in benefit to the individual is a trope repeated by both Dunham and her fans; the actress is cited numerous times as attributing the recently completed tour she did in support of her first book as inspiration for Lenny, where she met women who were “inspiring me with their sense of community and their deep, deep desire for intelligent, politically liberal, thoughtful content that would speak to them.”⁵⁵⁹ *The Guardian* suggests that the choice of the newsletter platform harkens back to a seemingly lost “culture of correspondence,” which, for women, can be “a means for finding their voices,” and connecting them to a “larger yet intimate community of women” attempting

⁵⁵⁷ <https://instagram.com/explore/tags/lennyletter/>. According to *Junkee*’s Meg Watson, the oft-shared image of Dunham as Rosie the Riveter was how we know that Lenny letter is “feminist.” Watson, “Lena Dunham is Launching A Feminist Newsletter That Will Be Like ‘Rookie’s Big Sister,’” *Junkee*, July 15, 2015, <http://junkee.com/lena-dunham-is-launching-a-feminist-newsletter-that-will-be-like-rookies-big-siste2/61304>. For background on the Cecil the lion controversy, see for example: “The Death of Cecil the Lion,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/31/opinion/the-death-of-cecil-the-lion.html?_r=0; and Mary Bowerman, “Minnesota dentist ‘deeply’ regrets ‘taking’ Cecil the lion,” *USA Today*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2015/07/28/minnesota-dentist-walter-james-palmer-cecil-lion-africa/30785881/>.

⁵⁵⁸ <https://instagram.com/p/5yCrbDRPmY/>

⁵⁵⁹ Roy, “Lena Dunham Tries to Cement Her Guru Status.”

to do the same.⁵⁶⁰ The newsletter (part of what has been termed the “slow internet”), as others have pointed out, gives women an outlet beyond leaving comments on Instagram or Twitter, creating a socio-politically empowered community partly through the shared experience of “common reading,” which works to the benefit of both the individual and group solidarity.⁵⁶¹ This attempt to catalyze an affective response, create an empowered and connected community, and celebrate the rights of the individual—all centered around the celebrity figure of Lena Dunham—suggests that Lenny is neither entirely neoliberal nor entirely liberal democratic, but is instead a third political model, which I turn to now.

Strange Bedfellows? Defining a Hybrid Celebrity Politics

While the previous two chapters considered examples of celebrity political acts that were categorized as being *either* liberal democratic *or* neoliberal in both ideology and execution, this was done with the full acknowledgement that different political models do not have a hermetic existence from one another.⁵⁶² As such, any and all of the liberal democratic and neoliberal examples of celebrity politics previously discussed must be recognized as being *primarily* an exemplar of the political model in which they were being categorized, with the understanding that they might at times manifest features of the other model. This final chapter, on the other hand, wants to consider examples of celebrity politics that instead of falling mostly on one of two ends of a political

⁵⁶⁰ Sarah Galo, “Lena Dunham’s newsletter is a victory for the letter writing renaissance,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/jul/15/lena-dunham-newsletter-letter-writing-email>.

⁵⁶¹ Petersen, “Lena Dunham is Launching.”

⁵⁶² In some ways I approached these examples as if they were Weberian ‘ideal types,’ with the crucial difference being that, whenever possible, they were understood as being in dialogue and/or connected with one another.

continuum, end up coming up somewhere in between the liberal democratic and neoliberal democratic celebrity political models—much like Dunham’s Lenny newsletter. Perhaps as a means to resolve the tension between the liberal democratic and neoliberal celebrity political models for both celebrity and average citizen-subjects (or as a manifestation of said tension), this third celebrity political model, which I am referring to as a hybrid celebrity political model, endeavors to bring together the two forms of celebrity politics. Working within a political framework that rejects both the all-encompassing, fatalistic narrative of neoliberalism and the romantic idealism that often accompanies liberal democratic politics, hybrid celebrity politics (hereafter referred to as HC) are neither fully entrenched in and “so co-opted by capital” that political action “has been rendered meaningless” nor do they attempt resistance in the form of an “outsider politics,” wholly removed from neoliberalism.⁵⁶³ HC politics appear, instead, to be a path through and between both the neoliberal *and* the liberal democratic celebrity political models.

In this chapter I will suggest that the HC political model might be best understood as an attempt to achieve liberal democratic goals through reliance on and utilization of a neoliberal framework. Accordingly, like liberal democratic celebrity politics, HC politics are most concerned with the enforcement and realization of justice and securing human rights, civil rights, and (most generally) political freedoms for all peoples. However, these political aims are pursued by deploying neoliberal rhetoric and strategies—

⁵⁶³ Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee, “Introduction: Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times,” in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* eds. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, 3.

especially the privileging of an ideology of individualism and the encouraging of an affective response as a solution to problems. While not exclusively so, the affective response encouraged by HC politics tends to revolve around various types of social media participation (such as ‘liking,’ retweeting, and reposting), which serves to reinforce the brand of both the ordinary citizen and the celebrity. And both the focus on affect and the ideology of individualism, situated in a politics that values rights and justice, channels the political energies of HC politics towards identity-based causes. Finally, as HC politics are an attempt at blending neoliberal and liberal democratic celebrity politics, the ways in which the role(s) of the state and the particular framing of issues (political, moral, or ethical) are also blended, resulting in something that is different from either the neoliberal or liberal democratic models.

While Wendy Brown argues that “a fully realized neo-liberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded,” for the HC political model, these clear lines of demarcation, which create a type of polarization, between public-mindedness and the individually-motivated self are obscured. Instead, for HC politics the liberal democratic notions of collectivity, solidarity, and the social good maintain a preeminent importance, however they are often called up to work at the mandate of the individual citizen-subject.⁵⁶⁴ This is a spin on the formula that is traditionally deployed in liberal democratic celebrity politics where the collective whole needs to work to foster and maintain a healthy, functioning social body, thus insuring individual freedoms through collective politics. While this remains true in HC politics, the needs and rights of the

⁵⁶⁴ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, 43.

atomized individual are *just* as important within this configuration (as well as serving as a point of connection between atomized individuals). Accordingly, many of the celebrities involved in hybrid politics have some sort of personal stake in the causes and issues they take up. And, as will become evident, many of the examples of HC politics discussed in this chapter tend to take the form of causes and issues that are rooted in issues of identity, which become a way of connecting individual identity to collective political practices. This can be seen in Lenny's editor-in-chief Jessica Grose's articulation of the Lenny reader and the ways in which Lenny will serve its community of readers:

The internet feminism conversation can be very circular and limiting and exclusive...And it saddens me to see that a lot of the competition is about saying 'you're not feminist enough': trying to kick people out of feminism rather than bring them in. And Lenny is an opportunity to say, 'There are many different types of feminisms, and we can work together.'⁵⁶⁵

And, it should be noted that in the case of Lenny, feminist inclusivity and solidarity are to be achieved through the fairly insular and mono-directional format of a newsletter, situating Dunham as the individual activating feminist solidarity at her behest. Within HC politics the identity of the celebrity and that of the average citizen-subject are both important, however it is most often the celebrity's identity issue (or personal stake in an issue) that serves as the instigator/rallying point for an average citizen-subject's political participation. This is different than the type of celebrity political engagement in either the liberal democratic or neoliberal models, neither of which draw on or extend from the particular identity of a celebrity—regardless of how important the figure of the celebrity is to either model.

⁵⁶⁵ Petersen, "Lena Dunham is Launching..."

This is not to say that identity-based politics cannot be neatly fitted under the wider umbrella of neoliberalism. As Lisa Duggan has argued, at some point in the 1990s many of the identity and civil rights organizations were caught up in the rising tide of neoliberalism, most clearly evinced by the shift towards an “upward redistribution of resources” discussed in the second chapter, and thus equally guilty of decreasing “the spaces for public life, democratic debate, and cultural expression.”⁵⁶⁶ The equality often sought after by identity-based political movements was redefined as “access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism.”⁵⁶⁷ Identity politics also could easily be re-understood as reflective of the ideology of individualism and diversity championed by neoliberalism. This incorporation of identity-based organizations into the neoliberal fold disconnected them from broader progressive movements and collective politics as a whole. In many ways, HC politics works to reconnect individual identity to the collective whole by both attempting to do away with the upwardly redistributive nature of neoliberal celebrity politics and working to resuscitate what has been minimized by neoliberalism. However, what is significant—and distinguishes them from the examples of liberal democratic celebrity politics discussed in chapter two—is that HC politics attempt to do so through a neoliberal framework.

Within the HC political model political contestation once again becomes not only a viable component but also, an important one—like liberal democratic politics, issues

⁵⁶⁶ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, xx.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51

are therefore framed *as* political. Overtly political language and imagery are deployed by HC political organizations, both as a way of getting the message ‘out there’ and as a means of instigating debate between citizen-subjects in the public sphere. And, while the political causes championed by HC political organizations and individuals can be pitched as having moral or ethical significance, this neither trumps the fact that they are inherently political nor does away with the need to discuss them through a political language, as which occurs in the neoliberal celebrity political model discussed in the previous chapter. Instead, when and where morals and ethics are woven into HC political causes, political contestation occurs (in part) precisely *because* that which is being pursued also has a moral or ethical component. In an essay for Lenny, “Why Do I Make Less than My Male Costars?”, actress Jennifer Lawrence begins by situating the gender wage gap within a wider political field, connecting it to feminism more broadly.⁵⁶⁸ In the body of Lawrence’s essay it becomes clear that what drives her to care about the wage gap and to choose to take it up as a worthy political issue falls within the moral terrain of right and wrong. While Lawrence does not express this sense of right and wrong in those specific terms, her emotionally charged language—referring to her male costars as “the lucky people with dicks” and claiming to be “over trying to find an ‘adorable’ way to state my opinion and still be likable”—makes it clear to the reader that part of the political importance of this issue falls within the right and wrong (or good and bad) of moral terrain.⁵⁶⁹ However, it should be noted that unlike a more distinctly neoliberal

⁵⁶⁸ Jennifer Lawrence, “Why Do I Make Less Than My Male Co-Stars?,” *Lenny*, Letter No. 3, October 13, 2015.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

celebrity political approach, an issue does not have to be predetermined as moral or ethical and subsequently framed as such for it to matter politically.

By the use of the term “neoliberal framework” I mean that many of the political acts of the HC political model utilize the rhetoric and strategies of neoliberalism to bolster and actualize their goals—which tend to almost exclusively be liberal democratic in nature. Thus, for example, there is more of a focus on, and significance accorded to, the individual—this includes the individual political activist, the individual who is to benefit from the expanded rights/justice/freedom being fought for, and, of course, the individual celebrity activist. Most distinctly, and not unrelated to the focus on the individual, there is a heavy emphasis on the importance of and engagement in an affective response, which was defined in the previous chapter as moving beyond just caring to such actions as signing postcards, writing letters, participating in social media, and/or purchasing material items both as a means of working towards a solution and as signifiers of care. In the case of HC politics, participation in social media is the most common form of affective response; while other forms of political engagement occur outside the mediated public sphere of social media in HC politics (such as rallies, for example), most attempts at democratic debate and political expression in the HC political model occur via an outlet such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. HC political organizations also partner with social media corporations to increase the visibility of a particular cause forcing political engagement to occur through such channels of consumption—making such consumption necessarily productive.

While it should perhaps be acknowledged that the use of social media for political expression has become not just everyday but expected for ‘politics’ of any form, considering technological advances and the prevalence of social media in our day to day lives, I argue that this is a consequence of the neoliberal moment more broadly and, more specifically, that the ‘branding’ effects of such virtual political participation have clear lines of connection to neoliberalism’s associated projects of self-improvement, self-investment, and self-appreciation (in particular as they are connected increasing one’s value as a unit of human capital).⁵⁷⁰ To follow actively a particular social media account—and especially to retweet, share, or repost from that account—all work towards enhanced visibility to and attention from other users as well as increased status/value (particularly if one’s engagement with a social media account is reciprocated—if a celebrity responds to a retweet or ‘likes’ the image reposted from their account, for example). This is not to say that visibility or status is the primary—or even overtly conscious—impetus for political engagement in the case of HC politics (or even neoliberal celebrity politics). For HC politics the primary motivator tends to be the pleasurable feeling involved with showing goodwill or ‘solving a problem’ —which seems to hold true for both celebrity and average citizen political subjects. The participation of the celebrity in these forms of affective response—not to mention their encouragement of others to do so (and their engagement with those who do)—of course serves to build and add ‘shine’ to a celebrity’s personal brand and iconicity as a ‘star.’

⁵⁷⁰ For an ethnographic account of social media, branding, and neoliberalism see: Alice E. Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

And, while I have already suggested that it seems shortsighted to posit that brand improvement is the primary/sole reason for celebrity political activism, in a moment where all human activity (celebrity or otherwise) is reconfigured as a form of personal investment and where all humans engage in the entrepreneurialism of the self, the connection between political activism and brand needs to be acknowledged. For as Alison Hearn has pointed out, “Hollywood celebrity is *the* paradigmatic model for self-branding and, perhaps more profoundly, for meaningful contemporary selfhood defined as it is by ever-increasing levels of public visibility, flexibility, cross-promotional capacity, and profit potential.”⁵⁷¹

Participating in social media as a form of affective response, in particular, also helps enable the individual (celebrity or not) to find their place—as an individual—in the narrative of a particular political cause, issue, organization or the like, which works to reconnect the neoliberal framework to the liberal democratic goals of HC politics. The finding of one’s place through social media in HC politics is not merely a process of individual self-identification, but also achieving a sense of belonging. This activates the connection between (and reliance on) the individual parts to the well being of the collective whole, which itself only occurs in these instances as a result of participation in the consumptive ritual of social media. In the process, this enables celebrity and average political participants alike to be interpellated as both liberal democratic subjects *and* capitalist citizens almost simultaneously, however paradoxical that might seem.

⁵⁷¹ Alison Hearn, “Brand Me ‘Activist’,” in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* eds. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, 31.

Usage of visually- driven social media—and especially photography and short video clips of the celebrity and average citizen-subject participants—is a particularly important form for attempting to create an affective response in HC politics. The various use of photographs and video clips by HC organizations in the digital domain is often framed as a form of visual political protest; either through the direct articulation of it as such, as with the NOH8 Campaign—to be discussed later in this chapter—or through its dissemination as such, which is more typical. This reconfigures the affective response, as well as the oft-perceived narcissistic ‘selfie’ culture of social media, as overtly political acts.⁵⁷² Such visual media obviously serve as a point of connection between the individual and the collective whole in so much as they make the individual political participants *visible* to the group, which in turn has the potential to encourage collective unity. It also visibly integrates celebrity participants into the collective whole, in turn normalizing the celebrity while simultaneously encouraging individual participation by average-citizen-subjects *because* said celebrity has prioritized political cause X, Y, or Z. The relationship between Lenny letter’s followers on Instagram and its celebrity co-founder Lena Dunham are illustrative of this. Lena Dunham’s pictures of her manicures expresses her interest in funky ‘nail art,’ which her followers (as evidenced through their

⁵⁷² For more on the deleterious effects of the selfie: Judy Farah, “The Selfie Craze: Are We Becoming a Narcissistic Nation?,” *The Huffington Post*, March 18, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-farah/selfie-craze_b_4983014.html; Carolyn Gregoire, “Study Links Selfies To Narcissism and Psychopathy,” *The Huffington Post*, January 1, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/12/selfies-narcissism-psychopathy_n_6429358.html; and Sally Kohn, “Do selfies erode our humanity?,” *CNN*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/10/opinion/kohn-selfie-culture/>. For examples of the other side of the selfie debate, see for example: Sadaf Ahsan, “Introducing the feminist Selfie: Women using social media to challenge oppressive ideologies,” *The National Post*, June 3, 2015, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/introducing-the-feminist-selfie-women-using-social-media-to-challenge-oppressive-ideologies-researcher-says>; and Derek Conrad Murray, “Notes to self: the visual culture of selfies in the age of social media,” *Consumption Markets & Culture*, DOI: 10.1080/10253866.2015.1052967 (2015).

comments) interpret as proof of her normalcy—that she is just like them. On the other hand, the bio of Lenny provided on Instagram as “Dismantling the patriarchy, one newsletter at a time” or in its posts in support of Planned Parenthood or Hillary Clinton can serve as inspiration for individual followers to become feminists or get involved in political debates because they seem these things as reflective of Dunham’s interests.⁵⁷³

It perhaps bears repeating that celebrities such as Dunham not only already have our attention due to constant media coverage, but, have been positioned by said coverage as both ordinary *and* extraordinary individuals. This enables the celebrity to take the attention that average citizen-subjects would already have directed at the celebrity and use it to catalyze an affective response on behalf of a given political issue or cause. The variously repeated attempts to reinforce the everyday qualities of the individual celebrity (Dunham’s manicure choices) and its visual documentation also serve to make us further invested emotionally in the celebrity, thus making the suggestion on behalf of the celebrity that we also have an emotional investment in the future of Planned Parenthood, for example, not unordinary. While other celebrity political models might rely on our emotional investment in celebrities to facilitate political investment, HC organizations in particular stress the identity of the celebrities as ‘normal’ individuals as an important component of political investment. We should care because Lena Dunham cares, however Lena Dunahm cares because she is just like us. However, what tends to occur in HC politics is that this causes politics to become monodirectional: because we have come to believe that a particular celebrity is just like us, they therefore have the same political

⁵⁷³ See the following Instagram posts for examples: <https://instagram.com/p/6VhO7bRPkM/>; <https://instagram.com/p/5czTUKxPqj/>.

needs, wants, and concerns. Therefore, it seems to be logical that the celebrity body can fill in for our ordinary citizen bodies and can speak not just on our behalf but also for and as us. Although the neoliberal model allows for the celebrity body to engage in humanitarian acts for and as us, it maintains the distance between the ordinary and extraordinary. And the liberal democratic model depends on a clearly demarcated distinction between the celebrity citizen and the ordinary citizen, as the celebrity always serves as a model of political possibility.

Finally, one of the hallmark distinctions between liberal democratic celebrity politics and neoliberal celebrity politics is in their understanding of the role of the state, with the former believing that the state has an obligation to its citizens in the form of a social mandate to see to and maintain the public good through various forms of regulation and social services and the latter that the primary role of the state is “to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to” maximizing the entrepreneurialism of the individual and protecting and supporting the interests of private industry and the free market.⁵⁷⁴ Like in other instances, HC politics end up splitting the difference between neoliberal and liberal democratic views on the state, resulting in a flexible relationship to and understanding of the state. As such, HC politics both push for the state to guarantee the rights of its citizens while simultaneously having no problem with private industry managing aspects of public services. However, it should be noted that the relationship of HC politics to and understanding of the state is neither consistent from one organization or individual celebrity to another, nor is it always consistent within a single organization.

⁵⁷⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

And still further, unlike the examples of neoliberal or liberal democratic celebrity politics discussed in previous chapters, the relationship to and with the state does not even always figure into the primary articulation of a HC political organization's platform.

This final chapter will explore some of the various manifestations of HC politics. Focusing on primary examples of causes generally targeting issues pertaining to the LGBTQ community—ranging from organizations focused on vulnerable populations (the Happy Hippie Foundation) to marriage equality (the NOH8 Campaign) to youth mentoring (the It Gets Better Project)—this chapter will attempt to tease out the form and function of HC politics as they currently play out. As the use of visual political protest, social media, and affect more generally are fundamental aspects of the HC political model—in so much as the organizations under consideration exist almost entirely in the realm of the Internet—more focus will be paid to the visual in this chapter than in previous chapters. As this is arguably the most recent trend in celebrity politics, these examples will be more current and therefore are less codified and in-flux than the examples in previous chapters.

Haters Gonna Hate, Hippies Gonna Love: The NOH8 Campaign, The 'It Gets Better' Project, & The Happy Hippie Foundation

We live in this great country that is about freedom. It is defined by our freedom and equality and yet we allow this discrimination to go on everyday and that's not what we're about. That's not what makes us great.

Actor Brad Pitt on waiting to marry Angelina Jolie until gay marriage was legalized⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵ Maggie Malach, "Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie Marry," *PopCrush*, August 28, 2014, <http://popcrush.com/brad-pitt-angelina-married/>.

There are countless other teens and young adults who are struggling to find a sense of identity and belonging in a chaotic and often unforgiving world. To you I say: it gets better. There is help to be found. There are places to turn, there are people who will listen...start by believing that life is worth living and you will find your way. And I'm proud to be a voice that stands to remind you of that any time you ever come close to forgetting it.

Actor Zachary Quinto, "it gets better"⁵⁷⁶

Anything beautiful on this planet takes time, and with time comes change. That's why I'm launching the Happy Hippie Foundation—because every life is valuable and we should make sure those who question their value feel protected...The fight to be free isn't over. We have to rally together and fight injustice...No one should have to hide who they really are, no matter what his or her name, gender, status or orientation. That's why happy hippies are here to say that every life is valuable and it is our mission to make sure those who question the value of themselves and their lives feel protected and loved by us...which they very much are.

Miley Cyrus, "Innovators vs. Dinosaurs: A Happy Hippie Op-Ed"⁵⁷⁷

Framing their political activism as a fight for freedom, equality, and justice, many of the celebrity (and average citizen) subjects who support the various hybrid political organizations focused on the LGBTQ community understand their work, like Lenny's feminism, as part of a larger 'new civil rights movement.'⁵⁷⁸ This connection between LGBTQ rights and the civil rights movement can be seen, for example, in an interview with Ellen DeGeneres in early 2015 revolving around the Supreme Court's decision to

⁵⁷⁶ Zachary Quinto, "it gets better," <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/video/entry/d0oess870ys/>.

⁵⁷⁷ Miley Cyrus, "Innovators vs. Dinosaurs," *Medium*, May 6, 2015, <https://medium.com/@MileyCyrus/innovators-vs-dinosaurs-5f40cfd29bc5>. Cyrus' op-ed was translated on the *Medium* website into 8 different languages, including Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese, and French.

⁵⁷⁸ See for example the website entitled *The New Civil Rights Movement*, which claims to deliver "news and opinion dedicated to the wide interests of the progressive and LGBT communities." "About," <http://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/about>. I am using the singular "community" as opposed to "communities" to be consistent with the organizations under consideration, who discuss these multiple orientations and identities as comprising a single community.

hear same-sex cases, where she related the issue of marriage equality to (a heavily mediated version of) the civil rights movement of the 1960s, stating that:

I don't know if you've seen the movie *Selma*, but the thing that changed the civil rights movement is when white people got involved and started marching, because until then, it was just nothing but violence and disaster, and it continued to be for a while...we just need people that believe in equality and believe in fairness and love. So if we have people that will join us and give us that, which is only fair to have the same rights that everybody else has, then it's a wonderful world.⁵⁷⁹

Three of the celebrity organizations that follow this pattern in approaching LGBTQ issues are the NOH8 Campaign (an organization originally conceived of to work towards marriage equality), the 'It Gets Better' Project (an organization designed to "inspire hope for young people facing harassment"), and the Happy Hippie Foundation (roughly organized to advocate on behalf homeless and LGBTQ youth).⁵⁸⁰ All three of the organizations under consideration in this chapter clearly embrace a hybrid political approach where liberal democratic ideals such as equality, justice, rights, and the social good are pursued through a (primarily) neoliberal framework. For the NOH8 Campaign, this occurs through their attempt to leverage images and stories of the individual (and specifically their rights) to make a political statement that is meant to work towards social equality. This is similar to the It Gets Better Project, which uses videos of individualized stories and messages as a means of providing hope for young individuals (which combined make a collective), as well as for creating advocates and allies to work on behalf of LGBTQ youth within state institutions. While for the Happy Hippie Foundation

⁵⁷⁹ Madeline Boardman, "Ellen DeGeneres on Gay Marriage: 'We Need Everyone On Our Side'," *US Magazine*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/ellen-degeneres-on-gay-marriage-we-need-everyone-on-our-side-2015161>.

⁵⁸⁰ It Gets Better Project, "About," <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>.

this is primarily is achieved through the organization's attempts to connect the relationship between self and other (seen for one in the dynamic between an individual young person and "the youth" as a group) with the collective quest for justice and freedom (the two are sometimes used interchangeably or as equivalent) and, more importantly, happiness—the nebulous, subjective concept that the entire organization ultimately hinges upon.⁵⁸¹ It should be noted that while 'happiness' conceptually is not political in and of itself, clearly the path to individual and collective happiness, as per the Happy Hippie Foundation, is achieved in part through political acts. For all three, both the liberal democratic and neoliberal aspects of their organizations are heavily indebted to and invested in the use of social media as an affective response, suggesting a narrowing of what counts as engaging in politics as such. However, before analyzing the specific ways in which a hybrid politics is manifest in these three organizations, a brief background on each one is important.

In 2004 same-sex marriage was legalized for the first time in Massachusetts, however, it was the passing of California's Proposition 8 in November of 2008, which amended the state's constitution to include language officially banning same-sex marriage, that thrust the issue of marriage equality into the wider public arena. While the "No on 8" campaign had celebrity support prior to the November election—with individuals like Steven Spielberg and Brad Pitt outwardly voicing their opposition to the proposed amendment and donating money to the campaign to defeat it—it was the subsequent protests, controversies, and battles that surrounded the passing of Proposition

⁵⁸¹ Not only is "Happy" part of the organization's name, but the logo is a yellow happy face with two letter "Hs" for eyes.

8 that drew in celebrities. In the months following Proposition 8's passing, celebrities increasingly made their disappointment with the election results known; at the January 2009 premiere party for the HBO series *Big Love*, Executive Producer Tom Hanks voiced his opinion on the role of donations from the Mormon Church in facilitating the passing of Proposition 8, stating that there "are a lot of people who feel that is un-American and I am one of them. I do not like to see any discrimination codified on any piece of paper, any of the 50 states in America..."⁵⁸² And, just over a month later at the 2009 Academy Awards, Sean Penn suggested that "traditional marriage voters should 'sit and reflect and anticipate their great shame and the shame in their grandchildren's eyes..."⁵⁸³ The defeat of the No on Proposition 8 campaign "provoked a groundswell of initiative within the GLBT community at a grassroots level, with many new political and protest organizations being formed in response" and celebrities were drawn to participate in these newly created organizations, such as the NOH8 Campaign.⁵⁸⁴

Begun within a month of the passing of Proposition 8, the NOH8 Campaign began with celebrity photographer Adam Bouska and his partner Jeff Parshley. Conceived of as a type of "artistic social movement," centering on a silent visual protest made up of photographs of subjects representing various sexual orientations "with duct tape over their mouths, symbolizing their voices being silenced by Prop 8 and similar

⁵⁸² Hollie McKay, "Tom Hanks Says Mormon Supporters of Proposition 8 'Un-American'," *Fox News*, January 16, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2009/01/16/tom-hanks-says-mormon-supporters-proposition-8-un-american.html>. For those who are unaware, *Big Love* revolves around a polygamous Mormon family who formerly lived on fundamentalist compound a la Warren Jeffs and the FLDS Church.

⁵⁸³ Douglas MacKinnon, "Tom Hanks, Sean Penn and Prop. 8," *The Huffington Post*, March 28, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-mackinnon/tom-hanks-sean-penn-prop_b_169905.html.

⁵⁸⁴ NOH8 Campaign, "About," <http://www.noh8campaign.com/article/about>.

legislation around the world, with ‘**NOH8**’ painted on one cheek in protest.”⁵⁸⁵

According to the organization’s website, in the seven years since they began, NOH8 has “grown to over 55,000 faces and continues to grow at an exponential rate.” While the campaign initially only took “portraits of everyday Californians who support marriage equality,” its national popularity (and staying-power) can be attributed to the participation of public figures (including politicians, athletes, and authors) and, more importantly, celebrities.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ Krystie Yandoli, “‘Hunger Games’ Star Josh Hutcherson Shows LGBT Support with NOH8 Pictures,” *The Huffington Post*, April 4, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/04/noh8-campaign-hunger-game_n_3015120.html; and NOH8 Campaign, “About,” <http://www.noh8campaign.com/article/about>. In the NOH8 photos, the ‘8’ is almost always written in red.

⁵⁸⁶ “‘NOH8 Day’ in West Hollywood marks campaign’s anniversary,” *LGBTQ Nation*, December 13, 2009, <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2009/12/no-h8-day-in-west-hollywood-marks-campaigns-anniversary/>.



Figure 11: Musician Dave Navarro's NOH8 Campaign photo

To date, roughly 600 celebrities, athletes, public figures, and the like have been photographed as part of the NOH8 Campaign and have appeared in the handful of Public Service Announcements they have produced, including actors and actress such as Josh Hutcherson, Lindsay Lohan, Michael Emerson, and Jane Lynch; musicians such as Mariah Carey, Lady GaGa, Dave Navarro, and 'Weird Al' Yankovic; athletes like Baltimore Ravens player Brendon Ayanbadejo (NFL), Hall of Fame player Isaiah Thomas (NBA), and LA Galaxy player Robbie Rogers (MLS); and public figures like reality television stars Kim, Khloe, and Kourtney Kardashian, former CNN host Larry

King, 64 members of the House Democratic Caucus, and Cindy McCain, wife of Arizona Republican Senator John McCain.⁵⁸⁷

While the NOH8 Campaign had originally been intended to explicitly focus on the issue of marriage equality, since its initial inception it has been more loosely re-imagined to “stand against discrimination and bullying of all kinds. The message of ‘No Hate’ can be interpreted and applied broadly, and everyone can relate to the message of NOH8 in their own way.”⁵⁸⁸ This change in scope, which occurred prior to the Supreme Court ruling in June 2015 that declared same-sex marriage legal throughout the United States, has made the Campaign more generally about acceptance and equality, being typically described as “a charitable organization that promotes equality.”⁵⁸⁹ Such a move allows for both greater organizational flexibility as well as longevity. The NOH8 website, for example, claims that they plan on continuing on into the “indefinite future” with “no end in sight,” a move afforded to them as a result of the forward thinking decision to broaden the focus to be about equality more generally as opposed to equality via the

⁵⁸⁷ Rogers is the first openly gay athlete in any of the 5 major sports leagues in North America and has published *Coming Out to Play* (2014), a memoir on his experiences. For a fairly comprehensive list that you can view alphabetically, see: <http://www.listal.com/list/noh8-dreamistrue>. See also “Familiar Faces” galleries 1-8 on the NOH8 website: <http://www.noh8campaign.com/photo-galleries>. McCain was criticized for her ‘late’ arrival to the fight for marriage equality. See for example: Michael Rowe, “Cindy McCain Comes a Little Late to ‘No H8’,” *The Huffington Post*, March 23, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-rowe/cindy-mccain-comes-a-litt_b_432335.html.

⁵⁸⁸ NOH8 Campaign, “About,” <http://www.noh8campaign.com/article/about>.

⁵⁸⁹ Cavan Sieczkowski, “Lauren Drain, Former Westboro Baptist Church Member Poses For NOH8 Campaign,” *The Huffington Post*, February 11, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/11/lauren-drain-westboro-baptist-church-noh8-campaign-photo_n_2663854.html. For an overview of the Supreme Court Ruling, including a link to the actual decision, see: Bill Chappel, “Supreme Court Declares Same-Sex Marriage Legal In All 50 States,” *NPR*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages>.

legalization of same-sex marriage.⁵⁹⁰ This is not to say that NOH8 does not maintain a heightened focus on LGBTQ communities, rather that it is no longer their only focus.

The NOH8 Campaign has generally been well received by various media outlets. The Florida *Sun-Sentinel*, for example, rather floridly and boldly suggested that:

“Seeking marriage, gender, and human equality” is about fighting hate as defined in any dictionary you pick up. The NOH8 Campaign is making the fight against hate picture perfect...Everyday people are walking away with pictures that capture a moment that’ll last lifetimes. At this rate the story of the NOH8 Campaign will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the most effective affronts to hate in history.⁵⁹¹

Media coverage of NOH8 has tended to focus on the celebrity participants in particular, often lauding them for their various forms of involvement, serving to paint their participation as an exemplar of individual heroics (not unlike media coverage of celebrities engaged in humanitarian work abroad). For example, numerous lists can be found on the Internet cataloging the celebrities involved in the Campaign, such as the one on *Queerty* listing “The 50 Most Powerful Celebrities to Pose For NOH8” or BuzzFeed’s “56 Awesome NOH8 Celebrity Portraits.”⁵⁹² And, in a *Rolling Stone* feature on pro-athletes who have shown their support of same-sex marriage through their participation in the NOH8 photograph series, the publication proclaims that: “History will reflect favorably on these outspoken players,” which is perhaps rather ironic since NOH8 is a

⁵⁹⁰ NOH8, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.noh8campaign.com/page/faq>.

⁵⁹¹ Tony Plakas, “‘NOH8’ an effective affront to recent wave of hatred,” *Sun-Sentinel*, July 9, 2014, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2014-07-09/news/fl-tpcol-noh8-20140709_1_hobby-lobby-hate-noh8-campaign. Although surely Plakas could not be including the video of television personality Steve-O marrying himself for the NOH8 campaign.

⁵⁹² “The 50 Most Powerful Celebrities to Pose For NOH8,” *Queerty*, December 18, 2013, <http://www.queerty.com/photos-the-50-most-powerful-celebrities-to-pose-for-noh8-20131218>; and LollapaRooza (community contributor), “56 Awesome NOH8 Celebrity Portraits,” *Buzzfeed*, January 16, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lollaparooza/awesome-celebrity-pictures-from-the-no-h8-campaign-8s5g>.

silent protest.⁵⁹³ The Campaign has also been generally well received outside the media. The city council of West Hollywood, California, for example, declared December 13, 2009 “No H8 Day,” to commemorate the one year anniversary of the Campaign’s inception, while a scheduled 2010 public photo shoot in Chicago had to be extended when it received over 1,400 reservations.⁵⁹⁴

This is not to say that the Campaign has received a universally positive response; an article in the conservative *National Review* claimed that, “Ironically, the iconic ‘No H8’ campaign logo features celebrities with their mouths taped shut with duct tape to symbolize how they’ve purportedly been silenced. It’s classic psychological projection from the practitioners of repressive tolerance.”⁵⁹⁵ Or, as another example, the *Southern News* reporter who suggested that many of the celebrities involved in the Campaign were hypocrites for not seeming to “follow in the campaign’s ideals” because they “violently and hatefully shared their opinions” on Sarah Palin in particular and conservatives and the Republican Party more generally.⁵⁹⁶ However, it should be noted that the celebrity participants remain the focus of a majority of the articles that disparage the campaign, further evidence of the prominent role that the celebrity plays in reinforcing NOH8’s platform and equally importantly, in ensuring its transmission. This is especially true

⁵⁹³ “18 Pro Athletes Who Support Same-Sex Marriage,” *Rolling Stone*, January 8, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/lists/18-pro-athletes-who-support-same-sex-marriage-20140108/the-noh8-campaign-19691231>.

⁵⁹⁴ “‘NOH8 Day’ in West Hollywood...”; and “NOH8 Campaign photoshoot in Chicago expanded because of overwhelming response,” *GoPride.com*, October 11, 2010, <http://chicago.gopride.com/news/article.cfm/articleid/13772601>.

⁵⁹⁵ Michelle Malkin, “In Defense of Brad Pitt’s Mom: The Left’s gay-marriage ‘No H8’ campaign turns out to be nothing but,” *National Review Online*, July 11, 2012, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/308445/defense-brad-pitts-mom-michelle-malkin>.

⁵⁹⁶ Jessica Pelligrino, “No H8 or Hypocrisy? Celebrities Participate in No H8 Campaign,” *Southern News*, November 14, 2014, <http://thesouthernnews.org/2014/11/14/no-h8-or-hypocrisy-celebrities-participate-in-no-h8-campaign/>.

considering that celebrity photographs make up roughly 1% of all the portraits taken for the NOH8 Campaign. Not dissimilar to the importance of the celebrity body as an antidote to image fatigue for crisis and atrocity, this overt focus on the celebrity participants suggests that their *visual* presence makes the cause of marriage equality more interesting or worthy of notice—providing, in this instance, an antidote to politics fatigue (particularly for such a drawn out and contested political battle).⁵⁹⁷ Related to the NOH8 Campaign, both in terms of approach and focus, is the It Gets Better Project.⁵⁹⁸

The It Gets Better Project, the creation of journalist Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller, began in September of 2010 when they uploaded a video to YouTube intended to “inspire hope for young people facing harassment.”⁵⁹⁹ In response to a number of suicides by teens who were bullied for their sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation), and remembering their own experiences with bullying as teenagers, Savage and Miller felt that the video format would allow them to “speak directly to LGBT kids about surviving bullying and going on to lead rewarding lives filled with joy, family, and love.”⁶⁰⁰ Within 24 hours Savage had received email responses from over 3,000 individuals and within a week he had received over 200 additional video

⁵⁹⁷ I would mark the visual documentation of support (such as posing) as distinct from sound bytes in media claiming support.

⁵⁹⁸ One of the few videos produced by the NOH8 campaign was actually for the It Gets Better Project, causing rightwing online publications like the *Breitbart News Network* to suggest evidence of a liberal conspiracy. See: Ben Shapiro, “Celebrity NOH8 Campaign Lies About Savage Ties,” *Breitbart News Network*, April 30, 2012, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2012/04/30/noh8-just-lies-dan-savage/>.

⁵⁹⁹ It Gets Better Project, “About,” <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>. To watch this original video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IcVyvg2Qlo&feature=youtu.be>.

⁶⁰⁰ Dan Savage, “Welcome to the It Gets Better Project,” October 7, 2010, <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/blog/entry/welcome-to-the-it-gets-better-project/>.

submissions from adults also sharing their stories.⁶⁰¹ The *SFGate* attributed the high response to the tragic timing of multiple high-profile suicides by gay teens, including that of Rutgers University Student Tyler Clementi whose death the *Tampa Bay Times* suggested would “galvanize the gay community” to help end bullying in much the same way that the death of Matthew Shepherd did with hate-crime legislation.⁶⁰² By its second week the YouTube channel Savage created to catalog the video submissions had reached the limit of 650 ‘favorited’ videos, which spurred the creation of a freestanding website and not long thereafter, an ‘official’ umbrella organization, the It Gets Better Project (IGBP).⁶⁰³ In the years since, the IGBP has inspired more than 50,000 user-created videos globally, which have been viewed more than 50 million times and have resulted in the 2011 publication of an eponymously titled book of essays, edited by Savage and Miller, and a 2012 television special hosted by Savage simulcast on MTV and Logo.⁶⁰⁴

Initially Savage had intended the It Gets Better videos to be “a place where LGBT adults can share the stories of their lives with LGBT youth” and the IGBP website serving as “a place where our straight allies can add their names in solidarity and help spread our message of hope.”⁶⁰⁵ Intending for the IGBP videos to be about average citizen-subjects creating solidarity amongst themselves, in early interviews Savage

⁶⁰¹ Peter Hartlaub, “Dan Savage overwhelmed by gay outreach’s response,” *SFGate*, October 8 2010, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Dan-Savage-overwhelmed-by-gay-outreach-s-response-3171312.php>.

⁶⁰² Ibid.; and “In suicide’s wake, a message to gay teens: Hang on; you are not alone,” *Tampa Bay Times*, October 1, 2010, <http://www.tampabay.com/incoming/in-suicides-wake-a-message-to-gay-teens-hang-on-you-are-not-alone/1125546>.

⁶⁰³ Hartlaub, “Dan Savage overwhelmed...” The IGBP provides a compliment to the work of the Trevor Project, a GLBT suicide hotline and to whom the IGBP donates a portion of the funds they raise to: thetrevorproject.org.

⁶⁰⁴ It Gets Better Project, “About.” *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*, eds. Dan Savage and Terry Miller.

⁶⁰⁵ Savage, “Welcome to...”

dismissed the idea of celebrity participation. In a *New York Times* interview Savage fielded a question inquiring about the role of celebrities in showing teenagers “that it’s O.K. to be gay” by responding that:

They see Ellen and Adam Lambert and Neil Patrick Harris. They’re good folks and important public figures, but those are gay celebrities. What are the odds of becoming a celebrity? What kids have a hard time picturing is a rewarding, good, average life for themselves. Becoming Ellen is like winning the lottery.⁶⁰⁶

He also preferred for video submissions not to catalog the “lifestyles of the gay and fabulous,” which by default a focus on celebrity would do (even if unintentionally), as a good life does not necessitate economic success. While Savage’s position on becoming a celebrity being equivalent to winning the lottery is arguably accurate, his position on celebrity involvement clearly changed, along with the intention of the videos strictly featuring LGBT adults addressing LGBT youth, for in less than a month of the IGBP’s inception celebrities had started creating videos of their own and discussing the cause publicly. The videos that make up the IGBP now include submissions from not just organizations, activists, and politicians but also media personalities and celebrities representing a whole spectrum of sexual orientations, including straight. Some of the celebrity participants include the likes of President Barack Obama, Adam Lambert, Anne Hathaway, the cast of HBO’s *True Blood*, Joe Jonas, Joel Madden, Ke\$ha, Sarah Silverman, Tim Gunn, and Ellen DeGeneres.

⁶⁰⁶ Tara Parker-Pope, “Showing Gay Teenagers a Happy Future,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2010, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/22/showing-gay-teens-a-happy-future/?_r=0. However, Savage was not an unknown entity coming into the IGBP, as the author of a syndicated advice column “Savage Love,” which received wide-spread public attention when he solicited readers to submit ‘definitions’ for Santorum with the winning definition being posted on its own website, www.spreadingsantorum.com.



Figure 12: Still from actor Zachary Quinto's "It Gets Better" video

Thus in later interviews, such as one conducted by *The Hollywood Reporter* in February 2012, while still maintaining that the most important video contributions were those made by the “tens of thousands average queer people,” Savage slightly rearticulated his position on the potential benefit of celebrity involvement:

What’s terrific about celebrity contributions are the leverage they provide to queer people. A lot of gay kids look up to celebrities and so that’s valuable, but also with Katy Perry, Ke\$ha, and Lady Gaga there are kids who are being bullied by peers who listen to the music created by those artists. For those kids to be able to turn around and say, “You can’t love Katy Perry and hate me” is powerful. For the culture to side with the queer kids is hugely powerful...[It] makes being a bully and a homophobe uncool and that helps.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁷ Jethro Nededog, “‘It Gets Better’ Founder Dan Savage: The MTV-Logo Special, How Tim Gunn Surprised Him,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 21, 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/it-gets-better-mtv-logo-dan-savage-preview-293170>.

Savage and Miller's work with the IGBP was honored by the Hollywood community when they were presented with the Governors Award at the 2012 Creative Arts Emmys, where they were introduced by a supporter of the organization, actor Neil Patrick Harris.⁶⁰⁸ Of course, the involvement of celebrities shifts the type and content of media focus given to any given cause or organization, which undoubtedly Savage would be aware of; like that which occurred with the NOH8 campaign, media attention was heavily invested in the celebrity participants in the IGBP. Ellen DeGeneres' video, in which she is described as pleading with the viewer with her "voice breaking," becomes the lead-in to a story on Tyler Clementi's suicide and the IGBP (which isn't mentioned until two-thirds of the way down the long story, summarized into two paragraphs).⁶⁰⁹ Or, for example, a *Huffington Post* article on the MTV-Logo simulcast of the "It Gets Better" special which concludes with a brief list of the celebrities who have contributed to the IGBP and a link to "some of our favorites." And, also like NOH8, multiple lists of the best celebrity videos can be found on the internet, including *Mashable's* "5 Inspiring Celebrity Videos Tell Gay Teens 'It Gets Better'" and *Buzzfeed's* "10 Celebs Tell You 'It Gets Better'".⁶¹⁰ Unlike both NOH8 and the IGBP, who rely on the cultural capital of

⁶⁰⁸ "Creative Arts Emmys: Dan Savage Tears Up During His 'It Gets Better' Speech," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 15, 2012, <https://www.yahoo.com/movies/s/creative-arts-emmys-dan-savage-tears-during-gets-023225151.html?nf=1>.

⁶⁰⁹ "In suicide's wake..." and "'It Gets Better' TV Special Featuring Dan Savage: Best Videos In Support of LGBT Youth," *The Huffington Post*, February 21, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/21/it-gets-better-dan-savage-mtv-_n_1291489.html.

⁶¹⁰ Samuel Axon, "5 Inspiring Celebrity Videos Tell Gay Teens 'It Gets Better'," *Mashable*, October 3, 2010, <http://mashable.com/2010/10/03/it-gets-better-youtube-videos/>; and Stacy Lambe, "10 Celebs Tell You 'It Gets Better'," *Buzzfeed*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/stacylambe/10-celebs-tell-you-it-gets-better>.

multiple celebrities, the Happy Hippie Foundation relies on, and was created by, one: Miley Cyrus.

In August of 2014 pop-star Miley Cyrus followed up her provocative performance at the MTV Video Music Awards the prior year by bringing Jesse Helt, a young homeless man, as her date, sending him up in her stead to receive her award for “Video of the Year.” Helt, whom Cyrus met while spending time at My Friend’s Place in Los Angeles, a drop-in service center specifically aimed at assisting to homeless youth, accepted the award:

for the 1.6 million runaways and homeless youth in the United States who are starving, lost and scared for their lives right now... Los Angeles entertainment capital has the largest population of homeless youth in America. The music industry will make over \$7 billion dollars this year and outside these doors is 54,000 human beings who have no place to call home.⁶¹¹

While Helt spoke, “a clearly emotional” Cyrus sat on the steps of the stage, wiping tears from her eyes and “felt like (she) was witnessing a modern-day ‘I Have a Dream’.”⁶¹²

Helt concluded his speech by directing members of the audience and at-home viewers to Cyrus’ Facebook page if they wanted to “make a powerful change in the world.”⁶¹³

Mainstream news outlets loved Cyrus’ stunt, embracing the pop-star’s use of her celebrity as a “platform” to “advocate” and obsessed over the identity of Cyrus’

⁶¹¹ Stephanie Webber, “Miley Cyrus’ Homeless Friend Accepts Her Video of the Year VMA For ‘Wrecking Ball,’ Gives Moving Speech,” *US Weekly*, August 24, 2014, <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/miley-cyrus-homeless-friend-accepts-her-mtv-vmas-award-gives-speech—2014248>.

⁶¹² Webber, “Miley Cyrus’ Homeless Friend;” Amy Zimmerman, “Miley Cyrus’s Coming Out Party,” *The Daily Beast*, June 11, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/11/miley-cyrus-s-coming-out-party.html>.

⁶¹³ Christopher Rosen, “Miley Cyrus Opts Out Of VMA Acceptance Speech to Advocate For Homeless Youth,” *The Huffington Post*, August 24, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/24/miley-cyrus-homeless-youth_n_5706401.html.

“homeless friend,” who looked like he could be an “up-and-coming rocker” and for whom the VMA appearance resulted in a six-month jail sentence.⁶¹⁴ Average citizen-subjects also lauded Cyrus’ move; as a *USA Today* article notes, “Twitter erupted with praise for Miley,” documenting Tweets about Cyrus ranging from one from @britneyspears that claimed “So much respect for Miley for what she did tonight. You’re the modern day mother teresa” to one from @jbunnyxoxo stating that “@MileyCyrus just showed the world the side of her that the media likes to hide. Im [sic] so proud to name this woman my role model.”⁶¹⁵ While unclear as to whether those tweeting were already fans of Cyrus, all acknowledged the significance of her political act as a celebrity and how such an act resonated with ordinary citizens.

Less than a year later Cyrus launched the Happy Hippie Foundation, in response to which *The Daily Beast* suggested that Cyrus was “one of the most progressive celebrity activists today” and that for “everyone who ever dismissed Miley as a perennially high, overly obscene, creatively manic malfunctioning Disney childbot, Cyrus’s recently cultivated image as a queer queen with an important message might

⁶¹⁴ See for example: Rosen, “Miley Cyrus Opts Out,” Neha Prakash, “MTV Had No Idea a Homeless Man Would Accept Miley Cyrus’ Award,” *Mashable*, August 25, 2014, <http://mashable.com/2014/08/25/miley-cyrus-homeless-teen-jesse-vmaw/>; and Anne Oldenburg, “Miley Cyrus sent a homeless man to accept her VMA award,” *USA Today*, August 25, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2014/08/24/miley-cyrus-homeless-man-accepts-vmaw/14549427/>. Helt had served a 30-day jail sentence in conjunction with a 2010 Oregon burglary but left the state before his probationary period was completed. More than likely due to media coverage of Cyrus and Helt, he was arrested for a parole violation upon his return to the state to visit family after the VMAs. Sean Michaels, “Jesse Helt, Miley Cyrus’s date at MTV awards, sentenced to six months,” *The Guardian*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/oct/08/jesse-helt-miley-cyrus-homeless-date-mtv-video-awards-sentenced-to-six-months>; Maria Elena Fernandez, “Miley Cyrus’ VMA Date Jesse Helt Sentenced to Jail,” *NBC News*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/celebrity/miley-cyrus-vmaw-date-jesse-helt-sentenced-jail-n220551>.

⁶¹⁵ Oldenburg, “Miley Cyrus sent a homeless man.”

make you want to reevaluate that appraisal...”⁶¹⁶ Cyrus had been an active donor to organizations like City of Hope and a participant in the Make-A-Wish program, both of which are charitable organizations popular with celebrities, before launching the Happy Hippie Foundation (HHF). However, the HHF, officially begun in May of 2015 is the first organization founded by Cyrus.⁶¹⁷ Clearly influenced by her experiences at My Friend’s Place (the homeless youth center where she met Helt), the plight of LGBTQ youth, and her own (now public) queer and (self-proclaimed) genderfluid identity, Cyrus openly acknowledges the ways in which she has chosen to capitalize on her own celebrity in advancing her political cause, claiming that: "When you have all eyes on you, what are you saying...It's like, I know you're going to look at me more if my (breasts) are out, so look at me. And then I'm going to tell you about my foundation for an hour and totally hustle you."⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ Zimmerman, “Miley Cyrus’s Coming Out Party.”

⁶¹⁷ I use the term “officially” because that is the date provided by various news outlets as well as Cyrus herself. However, the “news” page of the HHF website goes back to Fall of 2014 and in a letter penned to Governor Andrew Cuomo in March of 2015 Cyrus writes that “Last year I founded...” The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Impact Highlight: Speaking up for Homeless Youth in New York,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/impact-highlight-speaking-up-for-homeless-youth-in-new-york>.

⁶¹⁸ Karly Rayner, “People Are Quick to Judge Miley Cyrus, But the Enormous Amount She Does for Charity Might Just Surprise You,” *Moviepilot*, July 9, 2015, http://moviepilot.com/posts/2015/07/09/people-are-quick-to-judge-miley-cyrus-but-the-enormous-amount-she-does-for-charity-might-just-surprise-you-3367306?lt_source=external,manual. Cyrus cites the suicide of Leelah Alcorn, a young transgender girl, as pushing her to “learn more about the challenges in the LGBT community.” Zimmerman, “Miley Cyrus’s Coming Out Party.” “Miley Cyrus launches Happy Hippie Foundation to benefit homeless, LGBT youth,” *New York Daily News*, May 6, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/miley-cyrus-launches-happy-hippie-foundation-article-1.2212171>.



Figure 13: Fan-created image for the HHF that mimics Miley Cyrus' visual brand

And the HHF has been visually and ideologically modeled after the pop star, from the in-your-face neon rainbow palette and bright yellow happy face logo used by the HHF to the “be yourself” ethos that stands in as a sort of organizational mantra, Cyrus clearly serves as a charismatic leader for the HHF as an organization and a model for HHF supporters. As has been noted, the fact that Cyrus serves as a figurehead for the organization makes the HHF different from both NOH8 and It Gets Better, both of which rely on the involvement of celebrities in their various campaigns instead of revolving around a single celebrity.

The HHF has a rather murky focus of “fighting injustice” and helping “vulnerable populations” (which seem to loosely be the homeless and LGBTQ, and particularly the youth of these groups); according to an op-ed penned by Cyrus, she chose to create the HHF “because every life is valuable and we should make sure that those who question their value feel protected.”⁶¹⁹ HHF’s ‘programs,’ while not necessarily murky in the traditional sense, are murky in that they are created to attend to the organization’s broadly-defined focus and therefore don’t follow a singular strategic path, instead taking an approach that blends “prevention, immediate needs, and awareness” to “help youth achieve positive outcomes in life.”⁶²⁰ Therefore, the HHF, for example, works with “legitimate organizations” to provide resources such as digital support groups for LGBTQ youth and their families; partners with corporations, including a partnership with Instagram to create the #InstaPride campaign to honor transgender people (which will be discussed more later); hosts outdoor performances at Cyrus’ home and posts the videos to the HHF website and Facebook page to raise money and awareness for the foundation; and uses art and animal therapy to take a hands-on approach to treating at-risk youth.⁶²¹

At the core of the foundation is a belief in the power and importance of youth: the children are not just ‘our future,’ a saying commonly employed for a multiplicity of

⁶¹⁹ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Our Work,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/#our-work>; Cyrus, “Innovators vs. Dinosaurs.”

⁶²⁰ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Our Work” and “FAQ,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/#faq>.

⁶²¹ The “Backyard Sessions,” the name of the concerts held in Cyrus’ backyard, “featured Cyrus and her friends performing covers of classic songs...Joan Jett, Ariana Grande, and Against Me!’s Laura Jane Grace were just a few of the guests...” Brittany Spanos, “Miley Cyrus Launches ‘InstaPride’ Campaign to Honor Transgender People,” *Rolling Stone*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/miley-cyrus-launches-instapride-campaign-to-honor-transgender-people-20150615>. The HHF art therapy programs center around the importance of the “expression of what we feel” and “include the supplies and equipment to encourage this self expression.” They also fund “animal companion programs, which build health status and can provide a loyal friend to those who need one most.” Cyrus, “Innovators vs. Dinosaurs.”

purposes, and thus worth saving, but are also the locus of revolutionary change.

Accordingly, HHF makes it clear that “we believe in the power of young people to change the world” and to “challenge injustice, even when it’s controversial.”⁶²² This is also suggestive of a belief that there exists a split between the potential progressiveness of youth and non-youth populations. Such a split is also subtly reinforced through the youth-heavy imagery across the HHF website—for example, nobody pictured engaging in political acts appears to be over 30—as well as throughout Cyrus’ op-ed, which was reposted across the internet, in lines such as: “We are our own canvases—we should be free to create anything we want our lives to be!”⁶²³ And clearly as important as ‘the youth’ as a collective group are individual young people, as evidenced by the above quote about canvases. This is qualitatively different from the (unarticulated) belief of the It Gets Better Project, which relies on the words of celebrities and other public figures, all of whom are adults, to show younger generations that things change, providing models of “the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach.”⁶²⁴

The organizational background and brief explanation of what they stand for and do is important for the NOH8 Campaign, IGBP, and HHF as these things are directly connected to and inform the ways in which they are manifestations of a hybrid political approach. As has been noted, like liberal democratic celebrity political causes, all three of these hybrid examples are clearly rights-focused, with the ultimate aim being the achievement of equality. However, the pursuit of said aim through the attempted

⁶²² The Happy Hippie Foundation, “FAQ.”

⁶²³ See for example, The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Our Work;” Cyrus, “Innovators vs. Dinosaurs.”

⁶²⁴ It Gets Better Project, “About,” <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>.

cultivation of an affective response in average citizen-subjects and in a distinct focus on the individual—particularly individual rights and brand—distinguish them from the liberal democratic celebrity organizations discussed in the second chapter. I want to turn now to unpacking the specific ways in which each organization attempts to bring together liberal democratic and neoliberal politics to create a hybrid political model, beginning with the NOH8 Campaign.

NOH8's loosely defined goals of acceptance and equality, with an original heavy emphasis on the fight to guarantee an equity of rights through the legalization of same-sex marriage, clearly aligns with the core tenets of liberal democratic celebrity politics. Because the NOH8 Campaign's political message is intended to be transmitted visually through its associated portraiture, they provide very little textual context that speaks to their liberal democratic aims other than a couple of sentences on their website that mention equality, rights, and so forth.



Figure 14: Screenshot of the NOH8 Campaign website homepage

Otherwise, NOH8 relies almost entirely on the average citizen-subject's ability to decode the visual cues in the portraits, including the leet H8 (originally a clever way of equating Proposition 8 with 'hate' for those in California or familiar with the battles surrounding the Proposition, but with the 'hate' aspect being universally decipherable) and the use of duct tape over the mouth to symbolize the act of silencing, as well as their ability to understand these cues as being representative of a collective fight for equality and civil rights. The covering of the mouth, usually with tape, is of course a familiar form of protest, utilized by groups ranging from the anti-abortion organization Bound4LIFE (who cover their mouths with a piece of red tape bearing the word "LIFE" as part of a "silent

siege”) to the more recent Black Lives Matter movement.⁶²⁵ While the specific politics of the various organizations that utilize this visual trope differ, in all instances the tape is symbolic of silent protest and solidarity—thus the inclusion of text over the tape or somewhere on the face (reading “life,” “#blacklivesmatter,” or “NOH8”) is important. Clearly the reliance on these type of visual markers to convey NOH8’s political message has been successful as it is never misrepresented in media coverage as being about anything else; this is true even of articles critical of the NOH8 Campaign. Furthermore, the portraits themselves have become a type of visual currency on social media where individuals use the portraits taken of themselves or, more often, those taken of celebrities, as a way of staking one’s political position, clearly relying on their legibility to other users, which will be discussed shortly.

Where the reliance of the NOH8 Campaign on a basic grounding in liberal democratic celebrity politics is most clearly articulated are in articles written about and in interviews with portrait participants. For example, the headline for an article on the website *Queerty* about actor Josh Hutcherson’s participation in the campaign reads: “Josh Hutcherson Gets Taped Up for Equality.”⁶²⁶ Similarly, an article on actress Taraji P. Henson claims that her choice to “join forces” with NOH8 is because “when we say ‘no’

⁶²⁵ See: Bound4LIFE, “The Silent Siege,” <http://bound4life.com/the-silent-siege/>; Howard Koplowitz, “Walter Scott Shooting: Why Do Black And White People Think Differently About Police-Involved Deaths?,” *International Business Times*, April 8, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/walter-scott-shooting-why-do-black-white-people-think-differently-about-police-1874202>; and Colleen Harrison, “Ann Arbor community members hold silent protest against police brutality,” *The Michigan Daily*, May 21, 2015, <https://www.michigandaily.com/news/ferguson-ann-arbor-protest>.

⁶²⁶ “Josh Hutcherson Gets Taped Up for Equality,” *Queerty*, April 3, 2013, <http://www.queerty.com/josh-hutcherson-gets-taped-up-for-equality-20130403>.

to hate, we can say ‘yes’ to love and equality.”⁶²⁷ While equality and rights are not always iterated as such, substituted instead for ‘love,’ this substitution occurs within a pre-existing discourse that equates the fight to love whomever one wishes with equality and rights—such as which occurs in an article on the NOH8 portraits of actress Mo’Nique and the other cast members of the film *Blackbird*.⁶²⁸ In an op-ed for the *Huffington Post*, while publicist Jay Marose discusses NOH8 in the context of love, he also elaborates on the importance of rights, equality, and collectivity to the campaign. Discussing “why” he chose to pose for NOH8, Marose articulates posing as an individual political act done on behalf of others who are either also fighting or want to but are unable and for whom the “NOH8 Campaign puts faces to the discrimination.”⁶²⁹ Suggesting that part of the political motivation behind his choice to pose is “because Americans are heirs to a philosophical fortune and I don’t wish to squander it like the idiot offspring of the great robber barons,” Marose writes that:

I posed because my rights, our rights, are important...when I have faith in the rule of law, at the staggering progress made and inspired here and broad...when I see *Plessy v Ferguson* become *Brown v Board of Education* or see the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments become the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, I know that those principles are earned and remain my work long after election day.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁷ Jolie A. Doggett, “Photo Fab: Taraji P. Henson Supports NOH8 Campaign for LGBT Rights,” *Essence*, February 4, 2015, <http://www.essence.com/2015/02/04/photo-fab-taraji-p-henson-supports-noh8-campaign-lgbt-rights>.

⁶²⁸ Curtis M. Wong, “‘Blackbird’ Stars, Creative Team Members Pose for NOH8 Campaign,” *The Huffington Post*, March 17, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/17/blackbird-noh8-campaign-n_6888626.html.

⁶²⁹ Jay Marose, “Why I Posed for the NOH8 Campaign,” *The Huffington Post*, August 9, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-marose/why-i-posed-for-the-noh8_b_229187.html.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

Marose not only speaks to the importance of fighting to earn and maintain civil rights through legal channels, connecting the current fight to other historical battles, but understands this fight in the context of both his own rights as an individual and the rights of the collective whole. As reflective of HC politics more generally, for Marose and others, responsibility to fight for rights is both an individual and collective effort, as his rights and the rights of the group are equally important. Marose is, in effect, both publicly-minded and individually-motivated.

Similarly, Meghan McCain (daughter of Senator John McCain) speaks of being “honored” when she was asked to pose, understanding marriage equality as “not just a Democrat or Republican issue, it is a human one.” Equality is thus both moral *and* political, and worth pursuing, but not tied to party politics.⁶³¹ On the fifth anniversary of the NOH8 Campaign, co-founder Parshley claimed that his “commitment is to sharing stories of LGBT and allies just to kind of make a connection within everybody... We have to connect everybody to show that we’re all in this together...”⁶³² While co-founder Bouska notes that while the message and aims of the campaign are “politically driven,” he also suggests what has given it staying power is that it has “turned into such a positive message.”⁶³³ Even though Bouska attempts to take some of the political ‘bite’ out of the organization with such a statement, this is also illustrative (like the statement from McCain) of the way in which morals and politics work together in HC politics. In the

⁶³¹ Meghan McCain, “Why I Posed Against Prop 8,” *The Daily Beast*, June 19, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2009/06/19/why-i-posed-against-prop-8.html>.

⁶³² Charlotte Robinson, “NOH8 Founders Jeff Parshley and Adam Bouska Fifth Anniversary Event and More,” *The Huffington Post*, November 29, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charlotte-robinson/noh8-jeff-parshley-adam-bouska_b_4351718.html.

⁶³³ “The 50 Most Powerful...”

case of Bouska, the positive message is subtly equated with a message that is also right and good. However, as the NOH8 Campaign began with, and was heavily invested in for the bulk of its existence, the fight for marriage equality, clearly politics, and particularly a politics that works towards state reformation, continues to both shape and drive the organization.

Instead of relying almost entirely on visual imagery to speak for them like the NOH8 Campaign, the It Gets Better Project has a well-managed and clear articulation of their positioning that is present across all of the content of their website.



Figure 15: Screenshot of the It Gets Better Project website homepage

While Savage and others responsible for the content of IGBP website seem to shy away from the direct use of such terms as “equality” and “rights,” which represent the core

aims of liberal democratic celebrity politics, they comprise the subtext of the website's content. For example, the timeline, mentioned earlier in this chapter, provides a record of "how it's gotten better thanks to the efforts of supporters, LGBT organizations, activists and allies" by listing victories that are almost exclusively related to rights that have been gained, broadened, or even redistributed and of moments when more equitable conditions have been achieved. Thus we see the inclusion on this timeline of legislation, historical events or shifts, and so forth that are clearly identifiable to all viewers as momentous (such as the Supreme Court's national legalization of same-sex marriage, the inclusion of domestic violence protections for LGBTQ people under the Violence Against Women Act, and the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell) alongside mention of smaller victories (such as the White House opening its first gender-neutral bathroom and Caitlyn Jenner becoming the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of *Vanity Fair*).⁶³⁴ Or, in another example, visitors are encouraged to join with celebrities in signing the IGBP pledge, which reads:

Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I'll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it, at school and at work. I'll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other bullied teens by letting them know that it gets better.⁶³⁵

While not directly endorsing social equality amongst disparate people, which perhaps can be seen as reflective of the neoliberalism that also informs the organization, the notion of everyone deserving respect speaks to equality of a type. Perhaps more so than on issues of equality and rights, the IGBP espouses a liberal democratic political grounding in their

⁶³⁴ <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/timeline>.

⁶³⁵ It Gets Better Project, "Take the Pledge," <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/page/s/pledge/>.

desire to create community, work for the benefit of the social whole, and in their relationship to the state.

As a hybrid organization, the IGBP works towards collectivity and collective rights as well as the rights of the individual. Without question one of the primary purposes of the IGBP is to forge lines of connection between different generations, as a way for “gay adults to talk to queer kids about our lives and to give them hope for their futures,” forming a solidarity between the groups.⁶³⁶ Arguably, this solidarity would include people who have taken (and abide by) the organization’s pledge or individuals like the “straight kids” identified by Savage as “e-mailing the link to their picked-on gay classmates and friends who need to see it.”⁶³⁷ And clearly, the IGBP would maintain that working towards one of the central goals of the organization, stopping suicide attempts by LGBT youth and providing members of this group hope, is working towards benefitting the social whole. This is something that is articulated in many of the videos made by celebrities and other public figures for the IGBP, including one by President Barack Obama (categorized on the IGBP website as “Celebrity, Politician, Straight”).⁶³⁸ In Obama’s video he suggests that making it through being bullied will “help you get involved and make this country a better place. It will mean that you’ll be more likely to help fight discrimination—not just against LGBT Americans, but discrimination in all its forms...As a nation we’re founded on the belief that all of us are equal...”⁶³⁹ However,

⁶³⁶ Dan Savage, interview by Terry Gross, *NPR*, March 23, 2011, “Dan Savage: For Gay Teens, Life ‘Gets Better’,” <http://www.npr.org/2011/03/23/134628750/dan-savage-for-gay-teens-life-gets-better>.

⁶³⁷ Parker-Pope, “Showing Gay Teenagers...”

⁶³⁸ <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/video/entry/geyafbsdpvk/>

⁶³⁹ “It Gets Better Video Transcript,” Remarks of President Barack Obama Video for the “It Gets Better” Project Washington, DC, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/it-gets-better-transcript>.

as will be seen perhaps more starkly in the Happy Hippie Foundation, the desire to work towards the collective good and to create solidarity is activated by (and works at the behest of) the individual and the ideal of the individual.

The entire format of the IGBP depends on a self/other/us dynamic, where the confession of a personal narrative, divulged on behalf of other individuals to assure them that like the confessor's own life, their life is also worth living. This in turn creates solidarity between individuals that is hinged upon an unspoken but assumed understanding that this solidarity can exist because associated parties believe in an equity of civil rights, which benefits the social whole. As exemplars of a good and successful life, celebrities undoubtedly make clear for those watching that it does get better however, understood in the context of a series of videos, they amplify this notion of solidarity and equality. And, as celebrity videos exist alongside those of average citizen-subjects the recognizability and cultural power of these celebrity participants serves to elevate the importance of the other videos in the series. Oddly however, material and cultural privilege manages to be bracketed off (or, at the very least, not at the forefront) in the wider context of the IGBP videos; what is most important, ultimately, is the understanding that celebrities are like us, and vice versa: collectively we all have lives worth living. This self/other/us dynamic carries over into the advocacy work the IGBP does, where reform occurs by working with and attempting to reform the state.

One of the early criticisms of the IGBP was that "there is actually no path to change in this vision...Promoting the illusion that things just 'get better,' enables privileged folks to do nothing and just rely on the imaginary mechanics of the American

Dream to fix the world.”⁶⁴⁰ Savage, however, seemed cognizant of this fact, understanding that the IGBP videos are a palliative effort and “do not solve the problem of anti-gay bullying” and that work needs to be done to pass things such as safe school legislation and the creation of anti-bullying programs.⁶⁴¹ One of the ways that IGBP has attempted to move on to a path to change is through their BETTERLegal program, which lists the ACLU, Lamda Legal, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the National Center for Transgender Equality as participants. BETTERLegal uses the library of user-generated content created for the organization to be used at no cost “to support advocacy efforts undertaken by legal services organizations, by illustrating issues in a manner that is compelling both in the courtroom and the community.”⁶⁴² The rationale behind this is that these videos, created by individual users, provide an “invaluable” resource because they are *personal* accounts, which by way of their personal nature are able to showcase “the real-life experiences of LGBT people and their allies,” with their ability to elicit an affective response in the viewer the unacknowledged key component.⁶⁴³ The IGBP therefore envisions these narratives of self as providing the necessary leverage to successfully advocate on behalf of LGBT youth, to the benefit of the social whole. Noticeably, celebrities are left out of all of this—and are therefore only useful as cultural currency in the creation of solidarity.

⁶⁴⁰ Sady Doyle, “Does ‘It Gets Better’ Make Life Better for Gay Teens?,” *The Atlantic*, October 7, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/10/does-it-gets-better-make-life-better-for-gay-teens/64184/>.

⁶⁴¹ Savage, “Welcome to...”

⁶⁴² It Gets Better Project, “Enhancing Advocacy for LGBT Youth,” www.itgetsbetter.org/content/betterlegal.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

Rather surprisingly, the HHF's embrace of the basic tenets of liberal democratic celebrity politics are the most straightforward of the three organizations and are most evident in the foundation's manifesto, a term whose usage can be read as an attempt to reinforce the sense that the HHF is a (self-proclaimed) 'revolutionary' organization. The construction of an identifiable manifesto also sets the HHF apart from the other two organizations under consideration in this chapter, who do not really have an analogue available. Instead, NOH8 and It Gets Better collapse their mission into a brief 'about' that appears alongside a documentation of the work that they do and what they have heretofore achieved.⁶⁴⁴ Bracketed off from any description of the actual work they do, the HHF's manifesto is available on both the foundation's website and Facebook page:

Our Manifesto:

People who we say WE can't change the world ARE wrong. We will make some noise and cause a scene!

We will challenge each other and the world & will stop pointless judgment.

We know that people sleeping on the sidewalk could have been us or our closest friends if our lives were just a little bit different. And those sleeping on the sidewalk COULD be our friends if we gave them the chance.

It's time for us to speak up for the people in our streets, our cities, our world.

It's time for us to grow our passion, shine bright and change the future.

John Lennon said it best "a dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is a reality."

⁶⁴⁴ See for example: the "About" page on the NOH8 campaign website, <http://www.noh8campaign.com/article/about>.

It is essential to our lives to do good for others! The only way we can truly be happy is if we are making others happy! That is this hippies [sic] goal! #HAPPYHIPPIE⁶⁴⁵

This manifesto is a plain expression of the liberal democratic ideals of justice, equality, and (most importantly) working for the collective good in their most basic forms. While perhaps exposing the organization's naivety or insufficiently nuanced political savvy, in terms of the lack of sophisticated language, the HHF manifesto is not entirely dissimilar to Not in Our Name's "Pledge of Resistance" and "Statement of Conscience." The manifesto clearly stresses the importance of community and collectivity, consistently using such pronouns as "we" and "us" and the plural possessive "our." One of the FAQs on the HHF website articulates this collectivity as that which makes the organization "different," noting that: "we know that we are stronger together when we raise our voices and take action to make an impact."⁶⁴⁶ Collectivity is important to political action; politics are not achieved at the level of the individual, as illustrated by the use of the quote from John Lennon. However, collectivity is also important to what political action benefits, namely the social good, in the form of equality and (most importantly) happiness. And, while the HHF is clearly interested in the importance of individual happiness for self-care and individual well being, this individual happiness is dependent on, and arguably unable to exist without, the happiness of others. The happiness of the individual and the happiness of the collective therefore exist in a state of mutual

⁶⁴⁵ The Happy Hippie Foundation's Facebook Page, "Our Manifesto," January 13, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/HappyHippieFoundation/notes?ref=page_internal.

⁶⁴⁶ The Happy Hippie Foundation, "FAQ."

reciprocity, in line with the understanding of the relationship between the individual and collective typically seen in HC politics.

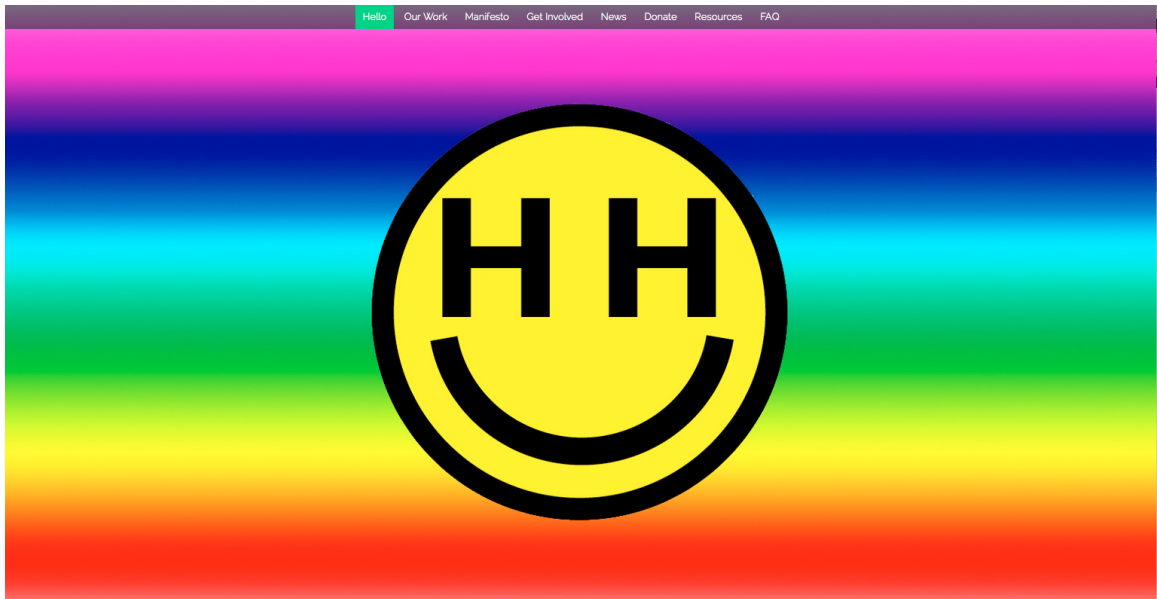


Figure 16: Screenshot of the Happy Hippie Foundation website homepage

However, as might be clear from the organization’s manifesto, the balance between the needs, rights, and desires of the individual with those of the social whole can prove to be tricky terrain to maneuver through. The happy hippie’s desire to advocate for the homeless is rooted in a form of empathy tied to the self wherein motivation does not come solely or necessarily because all peoples deserve shelter but because they “could have been us or our closest friends if our lives were just a little bit different.”⁶⁴⁷ For empathy to occur, which becomes the instigator for political action, the lack of privilege

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

of the homeless is juxtaposed with the privilege of the happy hippie (as individuals with shelter).

Such positioning of the individual self in relation to others and the collective whole is internalized and rearticulated by HHF supporters; in a post relaying messages from supporters “helping to create change on the ground,” Happy Hippie Adam writes about feeling embarrassment and regret for ignoring homeless people he has passed on the street and that at the least:

I could've tried to help them get a “normal life.” No one should have to live on the streets.

I'm only 15, and I have my fully life in front of me. You really got me thinking, that we all should be treated equal. It doesn't matter if you live in a huge mansion or in a little apartment in the hood or on the street.

For Adam, the concern is both about equality and about how you treat other people, the two of which he perhaps rather naively collapses in on another. Rather obviously, his idea of equality is neither particularly revolutionary nor well thought out: what makes people equal, and therefore normal, is having shelter. Adam's concern is therefore not with an equity of resources, just that we all have some degree of access. This self/other relationship is carried out throughout the HHF's website; an “impact” news item posted in January of 2015 about the organization's first grant, which would enable them to provide socks, underwear, and meals to every individual who enters My Friend's Place for two entire years, begins not by directly announcing the accomplishment but by framing it in terms of self/other: “Whether it's dancing around in our underwear, eating a snack on the run or taking off our socks after a long day, we all often take for granted the basic items in our lives that we use every day. Many homeless youth don't have clean

socks and underwear, or enough food to eat.”⁶⁴⁸ As such, concern for “vulnerable populations” such as the homeless is at least partially rooted in a fear of some sort of loss at the individual level. If we fix homelessness, then we never have to fear being homeless, of losing our access.

Keeping in mind the simplistic language utilized, the HHF manifesto manages to also touch upon the importance of (and goal of returning to) that which was lost to neoliberal political trends addressed in the introduction to this chapter, namely cultural expression (“grow our passion, shine bright”), political debate (“challenge each other and the world”), and space for public life (“make noise and cause a scene,” among others).⁶⁴⁹ In a roundabout way the HHF manifesto also makes a nod to the redistribution downward of both the tangible (shelter) and intangible (most clearly happiness, which is dependent on other factors such as equality). Although the organization’s focus has primarily been on the intangible, namely happiness, this in part is reflective of Cyrus’ vision of the HHF as being also about giving people “a platform to learn about issues that they might not have otherwise, a safe place to ask questions, a place to collaborate.”⁶⁵⁰ Thus, while encouraging action in the present, Cyrus also identifies the HHF as serving as an incubator or staging ground for the political activists of the future. Even though the organization does not have any clear ideas about how to solve structural problems, it does not only acknowledges their existence but makes attempts at explaining the ways in which structural and institutional factors serve to aggravate youth homelessness, for

⁶⁴⁸ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Impact Highlight,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/impact-highlight-happy-hippies-donate-basic-need-items>.

⁶⁴⁹ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Our Manifesto.”

⁶⁵⁰ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “#TBT: Happy Hippie Highlights,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/tbt-happy-hippie-highlights>.

example. In this sense, like the liberal democratic organizations discussed in the second chapter, the HHF is interested in consciousness raising as political action. However, while the HHF's manifesto (and the organization more generally) are neither apolitical or depoliticized, per se, as is typically seen in neoliberal celebrity politics, they manage to broach all of these things without explicitly mentioning politics, instead relying on language that insinuates political activism.

Switching back to the HHF manifesto, as an extension of HHF's handling of the 'political,' it should be noted that the state is completely absent from the document. The HHF mentions neither a desire to reform the state nor a position of critique ultimately aimed at justifying the need for privatization. This absence may be intentional—either as a way to maintain a position of not being *too* political, of distancing itself from politics 'as usual,' or perhaps playing off of the use of the term 'hippie,' a group that exists in the popular cultural imaginary as just being about 'peace' and 'love' (or in this case, happiness)—or it may be unintentional, a further reflection of the organization's naivety. This carries over into the type of work the organization has done thus far and the other organizations that they have partnered with, all of which seems to have been done with and through private organizations. This is qualitatively different from both the work done by NOH8 and the IGBP, who at the very least at various points articulate the fight for equality and rights as necessarily tied to state reformation, or that done by Cyndi Lauper, the celebrity founder of the liberal democratic True Colors Fund, the HHF's

closest analogue and partner organization.⁶⁵¹ Thus while the HHF does not fully ignore structural and institutional causes of issues such as youth homelessness or discrimination against gender nonconformity—providing statistics and other background information on these issues on their website—the lack of acknowledgment of the ways that these issues are tied to the state and the lack of a sustained focus on working within state channels makes the possibility of long-term, lasting change more difficult to achieve.

In contradistinction to the HHF, True Colors positions itself in direct relationship to both the political and the state. In a “Message from Cyndi,” which serves as the True Colors “about” page on the organization’s website, Lauper makes direct connection to historical political fights for civil rights, writing that:

When I was growing up in the ‘60s I was inspired and empowered by the Civil Rights Movement. Not only was the minority standing up for themselves and saying enough is enough, people in the majority stood alongside them as this country went through one of the most transformative periods in its history. That is one of the reasons why we founded the True Colors Fund, to lend a helping hand in encouraging my straight peers to get informed and give a damn about equality.⁶⁵²

The True Colors Fund moves from this grounding in a liberal democratic ethos to engage in work that combines community organizing, public education, and research with advocacy and public policy. True Colors works “within government to help ensure that no young person is homeless as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and if they do become homeless, that the programs meant to help them are safe, inclusive, and

⁶⁵¹ When one takes the time to peruse the True Colors Fund website, it becomes evident that the HHF is not just analogous to True Colors, but really is a repackaging of the organization for a younger audience with a less directly liberal democratic thrust.

⁶⁵² The True Colors Fund, “A Message From Cyndi,” <https://truecolorsfund.org/about/a-message-from-cyndi/>.

affirming.”⁶⁵³ True Colors has also forged collaborative partnerships with the USDA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Department of Labor, among others, and Lauper has appeared before the Senate as an expert on issues of youth homelessness and to advocate for the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.⁶⁵⁴

The HHF, on the other hand, is not partnered with nor do they (as of yet) directly work with state institutions, as does the True Colors Fund. This does not necessarily mean that they are averse to state intervention into the issue of youth homelessness. Nor does it mean that they believe that the failure of the state to provide a social safety net to protect vulnerable populations is irreparable. Either makes the state less important in solving social and structural issues, and would be reflective more of neoliberal celebrity politics. Cyrus, for example, has written to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and other state legislators to encourage them to join her in backing a proposal that would allocate funding in the New York state budget to support homeless youth and encouraged her fans to sign an online petition in support of the same.⁶⁵⁵ Or, while calling or emailing

⁶⁵³ The True Colors Fund, “Advocacy & Public Policy,” <https://truecolorsfund.org/our-work/advocacy-public-policy/>.

⁶⁵⁴ See: David Badash, “Former Homeless Teen Cyndi Lauper Testifies Before Congress On Ending LGBT Youth Homelessness,” *The New Civil Rights Movement*, April 29, 2015, http://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/davidbadash/watch_former_homeless_teen_cyndi_lauper_testifies_before_congress_on_ending_lgbt_youth_homelessness; Jordain Carney, “Cyndi Lauper lobbies senators on trafficking legislation,” *The Hill*, April 22, 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/239775-cyndi-lauper-lobbies-senators-on-trafficking-legislation>; and Emmarie Huetterman, “Cyndi Lauper Pushes Congress to Protect Homeless Teens, Especially L.G.B.T Youth,” *The New York Times*, April 29, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/04/29/singer-songwriter-cyndi-lauper-visits-capitol-hill-to-help-the-homeless/?_r=0.

⁶⁵⁵ Kenneth Lovett, “Miley Cyrus urges Andrew Cuomo and state Legislature to boost funds for homeless,” *New York Daily News*, March 18, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/miley-cyrus-urges-ny->

U.S. House Representatives to “urge them to cosponsor the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (H.R. 1779)” appears on the list of ways for supporters to “take action” provided on the HHF website, it appears right below the suggestion to “Use your social power and share the Happy Hippie message on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter.”⁶⁵⁶ And, it should be noted, that many (if not most) of the other more established organizations that the HHF is partnered with (including the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, the National Center for Transgender Equality, and the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), and to whom they donate the funds they raise and material goods they collect, are not just concerned with issues of equality, rights, and social justice but also have a relationship with the state that is more along the lines of that seen in liberal democratic celebrity political organizations (like the True Colors Fund). The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, for example, has a policy team on staff whose express purpose is to “ensure that the best and most inclusive safe schools policies are considered, passed, and implemented,” while the National Center for Transgender Equality’s entire organizational purpose is to work within state channels to enact policy change and provide a “powerful transgender advocacy presence in Washington, D.C.”⁶⁵⁷ Outside of these partnerships, the HHF more generally exists in parallel to or just on the margin of state politics, with the work they engage in serving as a supplement for the (expected but not necessarily

lawmakers-boost-funds-homeless-article-1.2154510; and The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Impact Highlight: Speaking up for Homeless Youth in New York,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/impact-highlight-speaking-up-for-homeless-youth-in-new-york>.

⁶⁵⁶ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Take Action: How YOU can Help End Youth Homelessness,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/take-action-how-you-can-help-end-youth-homelessness>.

⁶⁵⁷ Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, “Policies That Matter,” <http://www.glsen.org/policy>; the National Center for Transgender Equality, “About Us,” <http://www.transequality.org/about>.

always articulated as such) work of the state. This is also a position that they encourage of their supporters and that is reinforced by the specific ways in which they attempt to create an affective response.

The NOH8 Campaign, the It Gets Better Project, and the Happy Hippie Foundation almost entirely on the Internet as the primary platform through which to engage in political acts and specifically understand such political acts as encouraging and reinforcing socio-political solidarity. Both NOH8 and the IGBP have fully functioning, robust, and dynamic websites that either makes the general politics of the organization immediately clear (IGBP) or suggests them through the use of visual cues (NOH8). The homepage of the IGBP, for example, features a selection of project videos (including some by celebrities) but it also contains their previously discussed organizational pledge while the NOH8 website homepage relies on a constantly changing photo carousel of celebrity portraits taken as part of the campaign to ‘speak’ on behalf of the organization. On the other hand, while the HHF has an official website that includes necessary information on the HHF as a nonprofit organization, it exists primarily as backup storage for information about the organization that first appeared elsewhere. As such, the HHF website documents news about Cyrus’ political activism, providing links so that HHF supporters can learn about the pop star’s visit to the LA LGBT Center as part of her partnership with MAC makeup’s Viva Glam campaign or read the acceptance speech she delivered as the winner of amfAR’s Award of Inspiration, for example—as well as updates on work enabled by the HHF, provides links to resources and partner organizations, and lists ways to donate and get involved.

However, the dynamism of the HHF plays out on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr and, in fact, a fairly large percentage of the HHF website is a recap of what has occurred in the realm of social media. The HHF's Facebook page, for example, becomes a multi-purpose and multi-use nexus, where the organization shares both their own content and reposts the content created by supporters. In this way, the HHF Facebook page connects the individual Happy Hippie sharing their personal story with Happy Hippies as a collective (and, by extension of the organization's goals and purpose, the wider society as a whole), while also allowing for the transmission of the organization's liberal democratic grounding (as evidenced by the specific ways in which posts are curated). This is all necessarily dependent on the affective response of HHF followers, who engage, debate, and re-circulate the ideas and work of the HHF. This is very different from both NOH8 and the IGBP.

While both NOH8 and the IGBP rely on social media to give life to (or, more accurately, make 'viral') the work of their organizations, it comes across very differently from the way that social media is used by HHF.⁶⁵⁸ The heavily 'managed' nature of the social media accounts of both NOH8 and the IGBP is quite visible. The Facebook pages of both organizations, for example, are constantly updated with news items, images of celebrity supporters: you can, for instance, see actress Kristen Stewart wearing an IGBP t-shirt or actor Jussie Smollett holding up his fist in a NOH8 portrait. However, they are both missing the interactive quality of the HHF's page. This is not to say that users are

⁶⁵⁸ In fact, Blue State Digital, the company which built the digital platform and clearinghouse behind the It Gets Better Project won a Silver AAPC Pollie in 2014 for "Internet Public Affairs: Best Use of Social Media." <https://www.bluestatedigital.com/our-work/entry/it-gets-better>

unable to engage, debate, and re-circulate that which each organization posts—in fact they do and are encouraged to do so. For the NOH8 campaign in particular, this circulation of their celebrity portraits in particular is especially important and taken as a sign of organizational success. As they articulate on their website, the NOH8 portraits are used by celebrity citizen and ordinary citizen alike “on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to proudly show support for equal rights.”⁶⁵⁹ Multiple articles on the NOH8 campaign noted that the reposting of these NOH8 portraits as a symbol of one’s political position became ubiquitous on social media for a time period after the start of the campaign, with the images of the celebrity participants in heavy rotation, making this as much a sign of one’s support as it is sign of shared politics with the pictured celebrity. The desire on behalf of the ordinary citizen to share politics with the celebrity citizen is something that Planned Parenthood capitalized on in a recent campaign where average citizen-subjects could “stand with” celebrities like Scarlett Johansson and Elizabeth Banks in their support of the organization.⁶⁶⁰ And, the IGBP videos of celebrities were certainly viewed, and based on their number of views and how content circulates on social media, probably also shared more than videos of ‘unknown’ individuals; videos by Stephen Colbert, the cast of the television show *House*, and one of the members of the cast of the television show *Glee* have been viewed on YouTube roughly thirty times more regularly than those created by unknowns, and often at a rate

⁶⁵⁹ NOH8 Campaign, “About.”

⁶⁶⁰ See for example: Matt Siegel, “Aw Crap: Steven Paul’s Defec8 Takes a Dump on Adam Bouska’s NOH8,” *Queerty*, March 30, 2010, <http://www.queerty.com/aw-crap-steven-pauls-defec8-takes-a-dump-on-adam-bouskas-noh8-20100330>. Some of the videos filmed in support of this Planned Parenthood campaign can be found: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/celebrities-support-planned-parenthood-top-816610>

much higher than that.⁶⁶¹ What is of course hard to gauge is *who* is doing the watching and why: they could be the LGBTQ youth to whom the messages of hope are aimed, they could be individuals sympathetic to the cause, they could be people who are just interested in a particular celebrity, or some combination of the three. In short, they could be anyone, for any reason.

Although both NOH8 and the IGBP allow for average citizen-subjects to generate their own portraits or videos, users only have a modicum of control over this content. For example, individuals can create their own “amateur” NOH8 portrait (i.e. one not taken by celebrity photographer and co-founder Bouska) to submit to potentially be included on the “My NOH8” page, but there are rules they must follow and inclusion does not seem to be guaranteed.⁶⁶² And while anyone can create and post a video to their own social media accounts, the IGBP only selects a few to host on their website and YouTube channel. Unlike the HHF, neither organization appears to repost anything found on the Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter social media accounts created by supporters or appears to respond to comments left by supporters on official Facebook page, a pattern which holds up on other social media platforms, such as NOH8 and the IGBP’s Instagram pages. This lack of interaction between individual and organization is evidence of the fact that both organizations depend on the ability of the celebrity to speak for average citizen-subjects. Even though ordinary citizens can take their own pictures or make their own videos, the celebrity versions count *more* in terms of having any sort of social

⁶⁶¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/itgetsbetterproject/videos>

⁶⁶² If, as a non-celebrity, you wish to have your own NOH8 portrait taken by Bouska when/if he visits your town, it will cost you a \$40 fee as an individual or \$25 per person for group photos. If you are lucky enough to be under 12 or have a valid military ID, it is free. This does not include a physical print.

currency (in spite of the fact that both organizations have done some work to highlight the normalcy of the celebrity participants). Thus, this format and approach to social media precludes the possibility of dialogue and thus an exchange of ideas, highlighting the monodirectionality of these endeavors. This type of usage of affect and social media also puts a degree of distance between the organization (and thus the celebrity supporters) and the average citizen-subjects, a distance that is (at least seemingly) collapsed between Miley Cyrus and her Happy Hippies.

Even though the HHF maintains the monodirectionality of HC politics, in so much as Cyrus speaks for and as her fans, the HHF works harder to further develop not just the (relative) normalcy of the young celebrity, but also her authenticity. Cyrus is thus constantly in the process of *earning* her ability to speak for and as her fans and simultaneously encouraging them to validate this ability by affirming her politics on social media. This creates a sense of a relationship between celebrity and ordinary subject like that found between Lena Dunham and her fans that is absent in the other two organizations. The cultivation of the relationship between Cyrus and her Happy Hippies, in turn, serves to strengthen the organization's push for equality. While this process is evident throughout all of the HHF's social media, it is most visible and easily traceable in the organization's #InstaPride campaign.

The #InstaPride campaign, a photographic partnership between the HHF and Instagram which ran for the last two weeks in June of 2015, is the organization's most fully-formed and managed attempt at creating an affective response to raise consciousness and to further the organization's liberal democratic goals. According to

the HHF website, the #InstaPride campaign is “celebrating love, support, and resilience with portraits of transgender and gender expansive individuals from all walks of life,” in order to “help increase acceptance, inspire others for a positive future, and confront the stigma and misconceptions around gender.”⁶⁶³ This celebration of transgender and gender expansive individuals is framed as a concrete connection between the individual happy hippie and happy hippies as a group: by consuming images of others tagged with #InstaPride, the viewer will “learn more about the power of acceptance self-expression and freedom, no matter what our gender identity.”⁶⁶⁴



Figure 17: Group photo from the HHF's #InstaPride campaign

⁶⁶³ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Hello,” www.happyhippies.org; The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Recap: Happy Hippie Foundation Presents #InstaPride,” <http://www.happyhippies.org/blog/recap-happy-hippie-presents-instapride>.

⁶⁶⁴ The Happy Hippie Foundation, “Hello.”

All the portraits, staged and shot by Cyrus, that comprise the HHF's official #InstaPride series were clearly meant to be visual representations of the organization as well as a manifestation of the Miley Cyrus 'brand,' making Cyrus present even in instances where she physically is not.⁶⁶⁵ While everyone was encouraged to share their own stories as part of #InstaPride, which will be discussed shortly, the HHF took a series of photographs of a select number of individuals that are featured on the organization's Instagram, Facebook page, and an #InstaPride Tumblr. Using a largely monochromatic color palette (all subjects are photographed against a sun-yellow background, clad either in yellow clothing or are accessorized with items that are in shades of yellow) and showing subjects in joyous states (smiling, dancing, and goofing around with one another), the images are connected back to both the happy-face logo of the organization and invoke happiness more generally, while the confetti, bubbles, balloons, flower crowns, and floral face paint reference 'hippie' in the pop cultural imaginary.

Each subject is featured in multiple images; typically at least a couple on their own, one or two with family members or loved ones, and then, not infrequently, at least one with Cyrus (who is wearing a bright yellow mechanic-style jumpsuit), the notable exceptions to this basic formula are the pictures of three different transgendered couples and those of transgendered YouTube 'star' Gigi.⁶⁶⁶ At least one image posted of each individual (or couple), typically the first, invites the viewer to get to know the subject,

⁶⁶⁵ The same can be argued about every facet of the HHF— where Cyrus' influence can be detected in even the user-generated content. See: "Exclusive: Miley Cyrus Photographs Trans Icon Gigi Gorgeous for Her #InstaPride Campaign," *Marie Claire*, June 18, 2015, <http://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity/news/a14741/miley-cyrus-instapride-gigi-gorgeous-exclusive/>; Spanos, "Miley Cyrus Launches 'InstaPride' Campaign."

⁶⁶⁶ Happy Hippie Presents: #InstaPride, "Archive," <http://instapride.tumblr.com/archive>.

providing some biographical background on him/her/them, while the text that accompanies the other images flushes out the personality of the subject, including what makes them happy, their views on being transgendered, their advice for other transgendered individuals, and general messages for the world at large. These images rely on an individualized and confessional presentation of self while at the same time connecting the self to greater social whole, particularly in the way(s) in which such imagery are meant to circulate through the public sphere of social media (making at least the official #InstaPride photos not entirely dissimilar to the videos that the IGBP chooses to include on their website and YouTube channel).

By viewing these pictures and reading the accompanying narratives, we come to know these individuals. In one picture, Tyler (who happens to be the individual Cyrus brought along as her date to the amfAR Inspiration Gala and whom she met through Ariana Grande, another pop star), is introduced in the first-person: “I am 24 years old and I live in New York City. I am a queer, biracial, agender person. My pronouns are they/them/theirs...In my free time, I write poetry, read, sing, and walk through parks.”⁶⁶⁷ In another post on Tyler the viewer learns that: “My whole life, I was led to believe that there were only two genders. I thought I had to shrink myself to fit into a box that was never going to contain me...My body is not guarding a secret, and people’s assumptions

⁶⁶⁷ Happy Hippie Presents: #InstaPride, <http://instapride.tumblr.com/post/121688948822/my-name-is-tyler-i-am-24-years-old-and-i-live-in>. See also: Antoinette Bueno, “Miley Cyrus Met her amfAR Agender Date Tyler Ford Through Ariana Grande,” *ET*, June 17, 2015, http://www.etonline.com/news/166362_miley_cyrus_met_her_amfar_agender_date_tyler_ford_through_ariana_grande/.

about and projections onto my body will never reveal more truth than my words.”⁶⁶⁸

Accompanying a picture of Greta and Nina dancing, the two are a transgender married couple and the co-founders of the non-profit crisis hotline Trans Lifeline, is the following advice from Nina: “...definitely meet other trans people and have at least a few trans people you are close to. When you are working out your gender identity, it is super important to have some people you can confide in and get support from.”⁶⁶⁹ And, below a picture of a shirtless AJ, posed hugging and making silly faces with Cyrus, the viewer learns that, “Before the Happy Hippie Presents #InstaPride shoot I had met two other transgender people in my life, so to suddenly be in a room full of people who understood what I went through was Beautiful. It was sort of like being home.”⁶⁷⁰ This particular type of picture-narrative combination is especially significant because of what it says and what it shows, serving a single purpose. First, the implications of AJ’s statement are that Cyrus made his homecoming *possible*. Second, seeing the two of them (celebrity and non) clowning around promotes Cyrus’ authenticity as normal, like the rest of us. Combined the two justify Cyrus’ ability to speak for and as us.

Like the hug Cyrus gives AJ, in other pictures Cyrus appears with her legs intertwined with Tyler, showing off the ‘matching’ anchor tattoos she and Leo have, and playfully making bunny ears behind Brendan and his sister. In all of the portraits in which she appears, Cyrus looks not just comfortable and happy to be around the other

⁶⁶⁸ Happy Hippie Presents: #InstaPride, <http://instapride.tumblr.com/post/121691449358/my-whole-life-i-was-led-to-believe-that-there>.

⁶⁶⁹ Happy Hippie Presents: #InstaPride, <http://instapride.tumblr.com/post/122457292412/meet-greta-and-nina-co-founders-of-the-non-profit>.

⁶⁷⁰ Happy Hippie Presents: #InstaPride, <http://instapride.tumblr.com/post/121959611763/before-the-happy-hippie-presents-instapride-shoot>.

subjects, but is physically touching them (and in a way that doesn't seem contrived), with the result being that these pictures come across as no different than the pictures of Cyrus and her friends that she posts on her own Instagram feed.⁶⁷¹



Figure 18: #InstaPride photo of Cyrus and AJ

⁶⁷¹ See: <https://instagram.com/mileycyrus/>.

Again, this intimacy between Cyrus and these everyday people bolsters her claims of accessibility and normalcy. Of course, all of the pictures in the #InstaPride series importantly are also meant to work towards the normalization and equalization transgender people, with those pictures which include Cyrus doubling down on this effort. By depicting herself among the other portrait subjects in a party atmosphere, Cyrus is suggesting to viewers that “Maybe if you’re finally getting to be yourself, it’s more of a celebration...Like, you are living your f—ing life.”⁶⁷² Cyrus and celebration becomes the everyday, and thus becomes normal and, because we are all here getting to be ourselves, we become equal, celebrity and average citizen-subject alike. An integral part of this is of course the use of social media as the primary platform.

The choice of Cyrus and the HHF to primarily post these pictures in the dynamic environment of social media instead of just on their (more static) website suggests an understanding of the importance of inspiring an affective response for furthering political causes, particularly with youth groups. Social media not only facilitates the spread of the #InstaPride imagery, but allows participants to interact with the portraits, share their own pictures (and associated stories), and engage in discussion and debate around related issues. Thus such (primarily individualized) imagery and stories become a means of forging points of solidarity amongst previously disconnected peoples, again reinforcing the sense of collectivity and shared political goals. For example, beyond commenting on the #InstaPride portraits taken by Cyrus, many users took it upon themselves to create their own #InstaPride entry, posting a picture of themselves and brief biographical

⁶⁷² Katy Steinmetz, “Miley Cyrus: ‘You Can Just Be Whatever You Want to Be,’” *Time*, June 15, 2015, <http://time.com/3918308/miley-cyrus-transgender-rights-instapride/>.

narrative on Instagram, such as Claire Russell (who goes by the handle ‘lollipopkaboom’).⁶⁷³ Russell’s #InstaPride post is a beach selfie, accompanied by the following text:

Sharing my no-makeup, last-sunset-in-Maui selfie for @mileycryus #instapride to share my story. Not everyone’s family survived a child transitioning. But I am blessed and privileged and endlessly thankful that my family managed to transition when I did...I have pride in myself and pride in my family. #instapride #girlslikeus #beyondcaitlyn #trans #mtf #transdiego #translivesmatter...⁶⁷⁴

The HHF in turn reposted Russell’s post on their own Instagram and Facebook pages, where it was ‘liked’ by 7,866 other users on Instagram and by 1,075 on Facebook, some of whom were also moved to comment on the post. These comments ranged from those that congratulated Russell on her courage or complimented her on her beauty to discussions between posters on LGBTQ visibility and rights or the role of Christianity in bigotry.⁶⁷⁵ Others, such as user ‘rebponce’ used the opportunity to advocate on behalf a friend who isn’t receiving support from his parents or other adult figures in his life, posting a picture of herself pointing to a homemade sign that reads: “**Everyone** should be able to be who they really are! #WeSupportMax,” and included text imploring everyone (“It doesn’t matter who you are”) to help end transphobia.⁶⁷⁶ (rebponce’s picture was also staged in a similar, but perhaps less nuanced, way to those produced by the NOH8 Campaign speaking to the viral nature of imagery on the Internet). Like others, rebponce’s Instagram photo was reposted by the HHF and became a point of connection between

⁶⁷³ <https://instagram.com/lollipopkaboom/>.

⁶⁷⁴ Claire Russell, Instagram Post, <https://instagram.com/p/39kojcPOeM/>.

⁶⁷⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/HappyHippieFoundation/photos/a.1537742359814675.1073741828.1510750142513897/1607614166160827/?type=1>; <https://instagram.com/p/4zmpJAEgRG/>.

⁶⁷⁶ rebponce, Instagram post, <https://instagram.com/p/39gpQVr8s3/>.

other Happy Hippies. Russell and Rebopce are moved by the HHF's #InstaPride campaign, compelled by the images and stories that comprise it to not only share images of self and connect it to their personal experience, but attempt to do so within the political terrain with which the HHF situates the campaign.

In all of these instances what is perhaps most significant, and what further distinguishes the ways in which affect is meant to function between the HHF and NOH8 or the IGBP, is the specific type of role that Miley Cyrus plays. Not only is distance 'collapsed' between Cyrus and the other Happy Hippies, but through Cyrus' visible hand in the official #InstaPride photographs and in the organization's reposting of individual Happy Hippies' photos or stories and responding to their comments, it becomes as if Cyrus is actively supporting and validating these average citizen-subjects—particularly since the HHF is styled as the non-profit manifestation of the pop star.⁶⁷⁷ Whereas celebrities lend their support to and are involved in the work of NOH8 and the IGBP, this sense of mutual support and validation is missing, making it easier for the ordinary subject to step away from or distance themselves from political causes when they lose interest. This is because the sense of mutual support and validation serves to cultivate the appearance of a real relationship. Like our relationships with people in our day-to-day lives, the celebrity becomes an accessible figure. Our sense of familiarity thus justifies the ultimately monodirectional nature of the politics of celebrities such as Miley Cyrus or Lena Dunham.

⁶⁷⁷ I say "as if" because it is impossible to know if Cyrus personally has an active hand in her social media accounts.

Conclusion

Hybrid celebrity politics are increasingly popular—especially when it comes to handling issues/causes that cannot be neatly fitted under the umbrella of “humanitarianism”—and are being deployed in support of a wide range of issues, including feminism (the recent rise in celebrities speaking out on the wage gap) to police brutality (celebrity participation in the Black Lives Matter movement). Basically, HC politics can be seen cropping up around any issue or cause that falls at the intersection between identity and socio-political equality, rights, and/or justice. Because of the heavy reliance on the creation of affective response via social media for various political purposes, HC politics also have a keen eye fixed on younger target demographics. However, because of this heavy reliance on affect and social media, HC politics in particular are often criticized for being a type of “drive-thru activism,” devoid of any actual political positioning or investment.⁶⁷⁸ While it would thus seem easy to just write HC politics off as a simulacrum of the political; reading it, for example, as a way for neoliberal politics to nod in the direction of the most cherished aspects of liberal democratic politics (in so much as the pursuit of justice and equality are deeply engrained in the US cultural narrative of self) without having to actually broaden its scope, I think this is shortsighted.

Rather, I would argue that for all of the faults and weaknesses of HC politics, they are actually a way to make space for the (broadly defined) political. HC politics work to bring back the focus on rights, equality, and justice that underpin liberal democratic celebrity politics in a progressively more neoliberal cultural climate that is steadily

⁶⁷⁸ As has come up at various points throughout this project, this is an argument that has been leveled against celebrity politics more generally.

working to undermine or eliminate the political. However, as indicative of the type of political activism that HC politics engage in, what counts as politics as such has narrowed—a trend that is increasingly also finding its way in varying degrees in all models of celebrity politics. Even though celebrities still participate in more traditional forms of political activism, such as marches, protests, or testifying before Congress, increasingly celebrity politics are relegated towards emotional gestures, such as hashtag driven social media campaigns, illustrating the goodwill and care of the celebrity towards ordinary citizens. While these emotional gestures serve a purpose, they are surely problematic if they represent the endpoint of political activism and engagement.

Clearly technological advances and our relationship to this technology play a role in the form that politics take. In teasing out the cultivation of an affective response to further the political, people such as Malcom Gladwell argue a medium such as social media can only effectively be used for inspiring and carrying out political activism if the desired result is low-stakes and doesn't "ask too much" of potential participants. Gladwell elaborates on this, suggesting that social media driven political campaigns do not:

...involve financial or personal risk; it doesn't mean spending a summer being chased by armed men in pickup trucks. It doesn't require that you confront socially entrenched norms and practices. In fact, it's the kind of commitment that will bring only social acknowledgement and praise.⁶⁷⁹

Or, to use a term popular in news media, this is flippantly written-off as "slacktivism," juxtaposing the affective response conveyed through social media with real life political

⁶⁷⁹ Malcom Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>.

activism.⁶⁸⁰ According to an *Al Jazeera* op-ed by Sarah Kendzior, slacktivism is a rational response of celebrities to the “attention economy” created by the overabundance of information of all sorts available for consumption by average citizen-subjects and therefore competing for their attention.⁶⁸¹ As Kendzior suggests, whereas typically “Awareness is supposed to lead people to take action. However, in America awareness is action.”⁶⁸² This in turn, she argues, is “deleterious when it comes to the causes celebrities promote.”⁶⁸³

Although it is more common to find people taking a critical stance on social media and politics—particularly when celebrities are involved—there are exceptions. In an article for *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Clay Shirky suggests that the “more promising way to think about social media is as long-term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere” and where the “positive changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere.”⁶⁸⁴ While Shirky is specifically considering social media in the context of international political movements, this position on its capabilities can also be applied to

⁶⁸⁰ For a recent article dealing with a slacktivist approach to socio-political issues, see: Nicholas Kristof, “Payday for Ice Bucket Challenge’s Mocked Slacktivists,” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/opinion/nicholas-kristof-payday-for-ice-bucket-challenges-mocked-slacktivists.html?_r=0.

⁶⁸¹ Sarah Kendzior, “Does celebrity activism matter?,” *Al Jazeera*, August 29, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/20128287385825560.html>. For more on the attention economy, see: Michael H. Goldhaber, “Attention Shoppers!,” *Wired*, December 1997, http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/5.12/es_attention.html; Esther Dyson, “The rise of the attention economy,” *Al Jazeera*, December 28, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/12/201212271132754429.html>; and Matthew Ingram, “The attention economy and the implosion of tradition media,” *Fortune*, August 12, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/08/12/attention-economy/>.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁴ Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media>.

celebrity politics. In this sense, the use of social media in HC politics, and in its increasing use in celebrity politics more generally, is significant in its potentiality.⁶⁸⁵ The celebrity can serve as a facilitator of debate, aiding in the development of a (hopefully) politically minded public sphere, in which participation can then instigate average citizen-subjects to work alongside celebrities for change, to “open” politics back up, so to speak. This makes the claims of Not on Our Watch, Miley Cyrus (on behalf of the HHF), or even the movies that made up the post-9/11 anti-war film cycle that creating awareness is a significant part of their work less of an empty gesture and more an important initial contribution of celebrity political activists, as awareness is necessary to begin the dialogue and debate fundamental to the public sphere. What critics and supporters of social media and its use in politics (by celebrities or otherwise) tend to overlook is the actual role played by emotion.

Even though neoliberal celebrity politics are invested in the realm of the emotional in more ways than the other two models of celebrity politics, in so much as the depoliticization inherent in the neoliberal approach is partially dependent on the reframing of issues as entirely morally and ethically based, celebrity politics in general capitalize on emotion. Even though liberal democratic and HC politics make attempts to bolster their various political positions with historical grounding, concrete facts, and analysis, they are no less reliant on emotional stories to back their politics. And of course, this is aggravated by the fact that we have pre-established relationships with celebrities, which means that there is always already an affective dimension. This all has

⁶⁸⁵ In the world of advertising/branding they are referred to as “celebrity influencers.”

the potential to be, or already is, detrimental to the development of a functional political public sphere, as emotion can undermine rationality. This is especially significant as celebrity politics both model existing political possibilities and work to create new political possibilities for average citizen-subjects. Although it is easy to be critical of the politics and the political motivation of particular celebrities, if there is any criticism that should be generally made of celebrity politics it is that more effort can and should be made to re-channel political energies from the emotional to the rational. Celebrities need to work to forge a more developed bridge between the emotional and the rational. While affect, and emotion in particular, is perhaps a necessary starting point for political engagement in the current moment, it has little worth if it does not turn into practical, concrete ideas and actions. However, as celebrity culture in the US revolves around knowing all of the individual nuances of a celebrity and developing emotional investments in and attachments to celebrities this is maybe easier said than done.

Appendices

Appendix One: Film List

Brothers. DVD. Directed by Jim Sheridan. Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment, 2009.

Fair Game. DVD. Directed by Doug Liman. Universal City, CA: Summit Entertainment, 2010.

Grace is Gone. DVD. Directed by James C. Strouse. New York, NY: Weinstein Company, 2007.

The Green Zone. DVD. Directed by Paul Greengrass. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2010.

Home of the Brave. DVD. Directed by Irwin Winkler. Culver City, CA: MGM, 2006.

Hurt Locker. DVD. Directed by Kathryn Bigelow. Universal City, CA: Summit Entertainment, 2009.

In the Valley of Elah. DVD. Directed by Paul Haggis. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007.

The Kingdom. DVD. Directed by Peter Berg. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2007.

Lions for Lambs. DVD. Directed by Robert Redford. New York, NY: United Artists, 2007.

The Messenger. DVD. Directed by Oren Moverman. New York, NY: Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2009.

Redacted. DVD. Directed by Brian De Palma. New York, NY: Magnolia Pictures, 2007.

Rendition. DVD. Directed by Gavin Hood. Los Angeles, CA: New Line Productions, 2007.

Stop-Loss. DVD. Directed by Kimberly Peirce. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount/MTV, 2008.

Syriana. DVD. Directed by Stephen Gaghan. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005.

United 93. DVD. Directed by Paul Greengrass. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2006.

W. DVD. Directed by Oliver Stone. Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment, 2008.

World Trade Center. DVD. Directed by Oliver Stone. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount, 2006.

Appendix Two: Image Credits

One: FAMEFLYNET

Michelle Corrison, “Kim Kardashian West Honors 100th Anniversary of Armenian Genocide,” *People*, April 25, 2015, <http://www.people.com/article/kim-kardashian-instagram-armenian-genocide>.

Two: New Line/Everett/Rex Features

Mark Tran, “Rendition is the real thing—almost,” *The Guardian*, October 18, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2007/oct/18/renditionistherealthingal>.

Three: Jasin Boland/Universal Pictures

A.O. Scott, “A Search for That Casualty, Truth,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/movies/12green.html?_r=1.

Four: Warner Independent

“In the Valley of Elah Flag Scenes and Ending,” YouTube, projecthurley, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEwYM7SUESQ&lc=xUi-KFQCxVY6nXtVIC8opvIGPfbSHpMlznK_BEBnF7U. Video screenshot.

Five: C-SPAN/Not On Our Watch/Enough Project

“Capitol Hill Press Conference: Don Cheadle, Ed Royce, Jim McDermott Discuss Trip to Darfur,” Not On Our Watch, January 27, 2005, <http://notonourwatchproject.org/media>.

Six: Satellite Sentinel Project

<http://www.satsentinel.org>. Screenshot.

Seven: Time Inc.

<http://img2.timeinc.net/people/i/2005/startracks/050627/ajolie.jpg>.

Eight: David Smoler (Ferrera) and AP/Ramon Espinosa (Penn)

“Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide,” WXXI, <http://interactive.wxxi.org/highlights/2012/09/half-sky-turning-oppression-opportunity-women-worldwide>; and Ben Fox and Trenton Daniel, “Actor-activist Sean Penn says he's in Haiti for the long haul,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 23, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/Change-Agent/2012/0423/Actor-activist-Sean-Penn-says-he-s-in-Haiti-for-the-long-haul>.

Nine: Pete Souza, White House Photographer

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/5075924943/in/photostream/>.

Ten: Instagram User @sads_tagram

Mari Kasanuki, “15 Celebrity Instagrams that Support International Women’s Day,” March 9, 2015, *InStyle*, <http://www.instyle.com/news/15-celebrity-instagram-support-international-womens-day>.

Eleven: Adam Bouska via the noh8campaign.com

<http://www.noh8campaign.com/photo-gallery/familiar-faces-part-2/photo/13868>.

Twelve: Before the Door Pictures/Zachary Quinto

YouTube, Before the Door Pictures,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0OeSs870ys>, Video screenshot.

Thirteen: Instagram User @jimenawcsedits_

https://www.instagram.com/jimenawcsedits_/

Fourteen: NOH8 Campaign

<http://www.noh8campaign.com/>. Screenshot.

Fifteen: It Gets Better Project.

<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>. Screenshot.

Sixteen: The Happy Hippie Foundation

<http://www.happyhippies.org/>. Screenshot.

Seventeen: The Happy Hippie Foundation

instapride.tumblr.com/

Eighteen: The Happy Hippie Foundation

instapride.tumblr.com/

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