

celebrity diplomacy

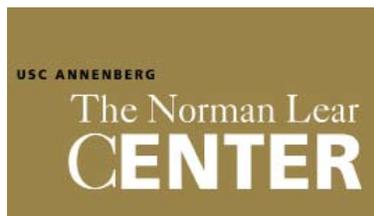


The Effectiveness and Value of Celebrity Diplomacy

An edited transcript of a panel discussion at the USC
Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
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Since its inception, the Center has become an ambitious and productive leader in the public diplomacy research and scholarship community. The Center has benefited from unique international support from the academic, corporate, governmental and public policy communities. It has also become the definitive go-to destination for practitioners and international leaders in public diplomacy, while pursuing an innovative and cutting-edge research agenda.

USC received the 2007 Benjamin Franklin Award for Public Diplomacy in recognition of the university's teaching, training and research in public diplomacy. The award was one of four inaugural awards from the U.S. State Department.

For more information, please visit:
www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org.

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concerns the relationship between modern financial markets, news media, and everyday culture. He also conducts research, teaches and writes about multiculturalism and consumer society, entertainment and celebrity, and the technological disruption of traditional media industries.

News outlets including *Business Week*, KTLA-TV Channel 5, *The Washington Post*, NPR, the BBC, CBC-Radio Canada and Reuters have sought Smith's commentary on a number of signal media events, including The 2009 Presidential Inauguration and the global financial and economic crisis. He has also written extensively about entertainment for mainstream publications and Web sites such as AOL.com, *Elle*, *Interview*, BlackEnterprise.com, *The Source*, *XXL* and *Vibe*. Before joining the faculty at Annenberg, Dr. Smith served as the Director of Primary Research for the Intelligence Group at Ruder Finn Public Relations in New York City.



Douglas Kellner is George Kneller Chair in the Philosophy of Education at UCLA and is author of many books on social theory, politics, history and culture, including *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, co-authored with Michael Ryan; *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*; *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*; *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (with Steven Best); *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; *The Persian Gulf TV War*; *Media Culture*; and *The Postmodern Turn* (with Steven Best). He has recently published a book on the 2000 presidential election, *Grand Theft 2000: Media Spectacle and the Theft of an Election*, and *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology, and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium* (co-authored with Steve Best).



Andrew F. Cooper is Associate Director and Distinguished Fellow, The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), and is Professor of Political Science, University of Waterloo in Canada. He holds a D.Phil. from the University of Oxford, and is an internationally renowned scholar on diplomacy and global governance, including work on emerging powers, state and non-state actors, international institutions, trade politics,

celebrity diplomacy and global health governance. Dr. Cooper has previously been a visiting scholar at Harvard University, Australian National University, Stellenbosch University, and the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. In 1993-94 he was the Léger Fellow in the Planning Staff, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada.

He has authored many books on the subject, including *Celebrity Diplomacy*; *Tests of Global Governance: Canadian Diplomacy and United Nations World Conferences*; *In Between Countries: Australia, Canada and the Search for Order in Agricultural Trade*; and *Canadian Foreign Policy: Old Habits and New Directions*.

Celebrity Diplomacy: The Effectiveness and Value of Celebrity Diplomacy



*Do celebrity diplomacy and
celebrity activism help or
harm?*

-Geoff Wiseman

Geoff Wiseman: Good morning, everybody. My name is Geoff Wiseman and I'm director of the Center on Public Diplomacy here at USC. On behalf of the Center and the Norman Lear Center at USC Annenberg, I want to welcome everybody to this workshop.

Let me say first how very grateful we are, both at the Center on Public Diplomacy and at the Norman Lear Center, to the Annenberg School Dean's Fund for making this workshop possible.

This fund encourages three things: international activity or perspective; innovative perspective; and activities that have impact on the real world. This workshop on celebrity diplomacy addresses all three of those issues very nicely.

The workshop was conceived in response to rising interest in the phenomenon of celebrity, or what is variously described as *celebrity activism*, *celebrity politics* and *celebrity humanitarianism*. Now, thanks to Andy Cooper's recently published book, we have a new term – *celebrity diplomacy*.

We won't spend too much time on these various concepts and terms. But whatever we call it, it's clear that we have a fascinating and controversial subject. A conversation has been percolating for several years now and has become a much more robust debate. This has included academic articles appearing in some prestigious journals including *Global Governance*, to name one of them.

Today, we want to consider not just what celebrities do for themselves and their



George Clooney in Darfur

own causes. We want to look at larger global issues like genocide in Darfur. We want to look at what celebrities do to promote human rights and their release and development in third world countries. We want to see what celebrities are doing in terms of environmental concerns.

We have some very big questions to address. One is to consider whether celebrity diplomacy – or whatever we call it – is really new; whether it is accepted widely as legitimate; whether it's more widespread today than it was 15 or 20 years ago; and whether it's more sophisticated, more institutionalized than it has been in the past. We want to know whether there is a clever use of what is called "soft power," not just in the United States but by other countries around the world. We also want to know whether we are investing our emotions, our time and our money in celebrity activities and whether this is a sound investment.

The bottom-line question may well be: do celebrity diplomacy and celebrity activism help or harm? These are only some of the bigger questions that we will try to address in this workshop.

Simultaneously, there are some less obvious questions. For this workshop, we wanted to go beyond the glitz and glamour of these famous movie stars and athletes. We also wanted to know the process by which people like George Clooney and Mia Farrow get to Darfur? What facilitated that process? What enabled that process? Who is behind these people arriving at those very distant, isolated and, in many cases, hostile places?

We are particularly fascinated with this question – both at the Center on Public Diplomacy and at the Lear Center – the question of how celebrities are supported, encouraged, guided, counseled, etcetera. We wanted to look at the group of practitioners who might be called the facilitators or enablers of this celebrity activism process.



One can't separate public diplomacy and the utilization of celebrity toward it without thinking about some of the effects mass media and new media have had on the body politic.

-Christopher Smith

For our round table, we invited a number of people who were administrators at the United Nations, who run the Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace Program. We wanted to invite people from some of the agency foundations here in Los Angeles. We wanted to ask political consultants and others to engage in this dialog. We're delighted that many of these practitioners – the professionals who do this behind-the-scenes work – will be here for the next workshop series.

For this session, we have a panel of two very distinguished academics. They will set the parameters and perhaps the framework for our discussion. I now want to turn the first session over to my very good colleague, Christopher Smith. Once again, I want to thank you all for taking the time to bring your expertise and your experience to this workshop. A very hearty welcome to you. Thank you very much.

Christopher Smith: Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure to see you today. I wanted to thank Geoff Wiseman and the Center on Public Diplomacy for inviting me here. I also wanted to thank Doug Kellner and Andy Cooper for sharing this morning's panel with me.

In light of Geoff Wiseman's comments about how new all of this is, I wanted to delve into some of the historical parameters of this issue and explore some of the shifts that have occurred in our media landscape that have contributed to the utilization of celebrity figures toward diplomatic efforts.

One can't separate public diplomacy and the utilization of celebrity toward it without thinking about some of the effects mass media and new media have had on the body politic. When you think about the zenith or the heyday of mass media,

you think about the movement from print journalism to radio and to the dawn of electronic media. With electronic media, you had an attachment of particular social communities and individuals to particular figures. A figure like boxer Joe Louis in the 1930s, for example, could become symbolic of the black cultural public sphere, as well as the American public sphere, generally. With the advent of mass media in the early 20th century, you had a connection between people in the public sphere and these unique figures.



Governments began to notice. Not coincidentally, with the advent of the war effort against the Axis powers in the 1940s, Joe Louis becomes part of the symbolic effort to generate support for the war. You begin to get this collusion between nation states and celebrity figures.

Simultaneous to that – and also in the 1940s – celebrity figures like Paul Robeson began to recognize ways they could marshal the synergy between their public image and their private stature. In Robeson's case, it was the work he did as an actor, an artist, an athlete. He could arrive at a certain synergistic balance and contribute his effort toward causes worldwide and through international organizations. He ventured to Russia. He ventured to Wales on behalf of miners there.

From the advent of this mass media period, you can see the formation of a kind of internationalist perspective about it. Politicians also recognizing this began politicizing these efforts. And here in the early 1950s is when you have the beginnings of the Cold War and the McCarthy period that demonized celebrities who dare to mix politics with their artistry.

Nevertheless, jazz diplomacy grew alongside the efforts to squelch celebrities' political works. In the late '50s/early '60s, you had American jazz figures like Louie Armstrong and Dave Brubeck sent overseas to facilitate a positive image for the United States abroad.



You had all of these asymmetrical movements going on around celebrity politics and their mass mediation, stretching from the 1930s through the early 1960s.

Of course, as the '60s progressed, celebrities became even more overt and radicalized with their politics. This leads to a demise of appreciation for legitimate political figures in the domestic context, especially after the Watergate scandal in the 1970s.

Reagan fills that vacuum in the 1980s with a whole new way in which a figure could be political and part of the entertainment realm at the same time.

And at the same moment, you get the rise of entertainment figures like Bob Geldof who filled the void of the neoliberal state's eradication of other measures of assistance for developing people – a filling of that void with artistic projects like *Live Aid* that sought to help others by alternative means.

Coming up to the present day – from the 1990s forward – you see a further blending and closer proximity between celebrity and political figures. And out of this, celebrities continue to internationalize their efforts. Now we see celebrities like Angelina Jolie lending their efforts toward diplomatic agendas; steeping themselves in a certain amount of grassroots diplomatic expertise and lending that expertise their celebrity aura, stature and access.

We see now very clearly an explosion of celebrities being attached to particular global causes – whether it's Leonardo DiCaprio's efforts on behalf of the green movement or campaigns that use celebrity figures, like the "I am African" AIDS initiative that proved so controversial.



Angelina Jolie in Somalia

By Hege/UNHCR

Of course, trendwise the presiding figure over all of this is Bono. If you've read any of the work of the gentlemen up here, you know that Bono is very much the celebrity diplomat, even more than Geldof who's more of a cantankerous provocateur. That might be something we can argue about.

But you have this explosion of activity in celebrity diplomacy, which leads me to the question that will start our initial conversation.

In recent years, we've seen an acceleration of a trend where celebrities of all sorts have become more visible participants in debates and actions concerning a wide range of international, political and humanitarian issues. On balance, this has been a good thing, but we're going to debate now the extent our panelists agree or disagree with that assessment, beginning with Andrew Cooper.

Andrew Cooper: The question Chris has posed has animated my activities. I started this as an associate director of a new think tank in Canada – the Center for a National Governance Innovation, sponsored by one of the co-CEOs of Research in Motion. So I have to give that a plug. Every time President Obama waves his BlackBerry, we're very pleased. I'm also at USC. And, of course, there's no better place to be doing celebrity diplomacy than at USC through the Fulbright Foundation. I'm very grateful for that.

When I started my research, there was criticism of it and a belief that this type of phenomenon wasn't a good thing. There were three types of criticism:



Bob Geldof





*Who can get on to Oprah?
Who can get op-eds into the
Wall Street Journal?*

-Andrew Cooper

The first is that they're not really diplomats. Instead, they're dumbing down diplomacy. We all know who diplomacy is done by; and celebrities don't do diplomacy.

Secondly, this is a cynical activity. It's manipulation by has-beens and wannabes. I'm sure you've all heard this.

And, the third was probably the most serious of the critiques. This is an elite operation, so very much "top down."

The more I got into this project, the more I saw the positive virtues of celebrity diplomacy. This phenomenon filled gaps in diplomacy that diplomats weren't able to fill. Diplomats – at least classical diplomats – overestimate their popularity. Indeed, I think they even overestimate their legitimacy.

Good diplomats have tended to operate in secret and behind closed doors – the Henry Kissinger phenomenon. A lot of conversations by diplomats lately, and indeed, by the UK foreign minister, reveal something similar. Everybody hates celebrity diplomats. But why? They're attractive. They can use soft media and new media. *Who can get on to Oprah? Who can get op-eds into the Wall Street Journal, etcetera? We can go through a whole long list of these types of activities.*

Celebrity diplomats are looking for space in the public sphere, soft power, politics of attraction, all sorts of things. When Joe Nye talks about smart power and these types of activities, they very much plug into the role of celebrity diplomats.

Yes, there have been problems. Yes, some individuals didn't do a good job. I don't think I'm ever going to go out on a dinner date with Ginger Spice. Ginger Spice is somebody who you could always bring to the table and say, "It was not a good idea to send Ginger Spice as a UN goodwill ambassador on reproductive issues to the Philippines." Also, it's a problem that the Spice Girls were going to stay famous forever and ever.



Some of the strengths of this project are exactly those sort of human faces. It makes celebrities and diplomats mesh into a layered process that really challenges not only classical diplomacy but indeed diplomacy through *nongovernmental organizations* or the NGOs.

There's a huge debate, and this is another issue we can discuss, about whether NGOs do a good job on the front lines. I ask you whether you could name more than one or two heads of NGOs. These people are faceless, even odorless in some sense – at least in the context of the media. Oxfam is a good example. It embraces celebrity diplomats, but most NGOs find it a phenomenon that's problematic.

It's also a multi-layered process. There's a huge difference between top-tiered, mainstream celebrity diplomats and a number of other adjacent phenomenons. When I'm talking about celebrity diplomats, I'm not talking about Madonna for example. The politics of adoption doesn't really have much of a connotation of diplomacy. What I'm interested in are people who engage with state officials, engage with institutions, and in this regard they certainly want access to those organizations.

They also use a certain style. Here, again, I reference Bono as a good example. He is the exemplar of a charming type of diplomacy. One might even call him "manipulative" behind the scenes. He is certainly calculated. But he's charming and hardworking and these are very interesting components.

There're two other types and Chris mentioned one of them: the provocateurs, the people



Bono at the World Economic Forum

Giam Vail / World Economic Forum

that I mention as sort of the anti-diplomats. Some of them, of course, do very good work. But again, it stretches the notion of diplomacy.



Bob Geldof is everywhere. I was at the G20 Media Center a couple of weeks ago. There he was. He was bouncing around the room. He was giving interviews to Al Jazeera, all sorts of different media. He might not be as famous as he was 20 or 25 years ago as a pop star, but he's certainly very well known by media representatives.

Mia Farrow is also stretching the bounds between diplomacy and anti-diplomacy. You start talking about the "Genocide Olympics." Is this diplomacy? Again, we can talk about this.

Harry Belafonte is another example. My colleague, Jorge Heine, has just done a nice op-ed for the *Jamaica Gleaner* on the 50th anniversary of Harry Belafonte's performance at Carnegie Hall. Even though we can love Harry for all sorts of things, what happens when you call President Bush the biggest war criminal in history with President Chavez in attendance? Again, that stretches our notion of diplomacy.

And, of course, there's Sean Penn, Brigitte Bardot – there's a long list.

This gets into the question of value. Mainstream celebrity diplomats are most valuable when they're building momentum, building enthusiasm for issues. There's also another strand of celebrity diplomats who come from the business side of things.

Once again, this is a layered exercise. I wouldn't call Warren Buffet a celebrity diplomat. He's more of a classic 19th century philanthropist. He gives money. He's got a lot of money. He's not all that interested in a lot of international issues. What



Mia Farrow

Saull Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

do they say? Warren Buffett has two interests in life – making money and playing bridge. But he is also very generous with his \$30-plus billion gift to the Gates Foundation.

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-Andrew Cooper



But Bill Gates is. He is the type of business-side celebrity diplomat that I’m interested in studying. When he visits Bangladesh, for example, he gets a bigger reception than leaders from most G8 countries. In 2005, his foundation spent more on health than the World Health Organization. Again, this doesn’t say much about global governance, or maybe it does say a lot about global governance. But what it really says is that Bill Gates is filling a gap.

Then, finally, on the anti-diplomacy side, there’s somebody like George Soros. He’s sort of diplomatic but also anti-diplomatic: goading, provoking the Putin regime or in the Ukraine, in Georgia, but making a difference in terms of a democratic component.

The days of Audrey Hepburn are long gone. There are three great examples. One of the best is Bono. I talk about the “Bonoization” of diplomacy because I think he stands out in this regard. He’s an insider. He’s an outsider. He uses the politics of theater. He uses the club model. He gets bilaterals with George Bush, Tony Blair, anybody he wants in the G8 setting. But at the same time, he has the attention of people in big concerts, like in the Rostock concert in Germany. Bono can engage in all sorts of activities.

The final thing about Bono – and it shouldn’t be underestimated – is that he is both the mentor and the mentored. He is mentored, yes. But he also searches out. I’m sure he would look to USC. He looked to Jeffery Sachs for mentorship. At the same time, when you look at Hollywood, you see that Bono has mentored an awful lot of celebrities in this town, and he does it on a global level. He does it with diaspora representation, like Wyclef Jean in Haiti.

The second great example is George Clooney. He’s very cautious, very interesting, but again,



Angelina Jolie would not be who we would pick as the successful archetype for celebrity diplomacy.

-Andrew Cooper

building up momentum and coverage for an issue. I was in India a year ago and some friends invited me to a very nice hotel, the Imperial in Delhi. I got there, picked up the newspaper and here was the headline: "George Clooney eats dinner at the Imperial Hotel with the Minister of External Affairs." The foreign minister of India met with George Clooney in a private dinner. Afterward, he was going off to Jaipur to meet Indian peacekeepers, the Southern command. It's amazing that he has this kind of access. There are probably a lot of people in India who haven't seen many George Clooney movies, but he's got that access. How many diplomats? How many high commissioners or ambassadors can get that type of representation?

But at the same time, as we know, George is a hybrid. He's not only working for the United Nations as a Messenger of Peace, which is a high-ranking position; he also strays into NGO activity as well. Certainly on Darfur, we see him standing on the White House lawn talking to Larry King about Darfur and pushing for a special representative on Darfur.

And how can we leave out Angelina? She is probably the most surprising celebrity diplomat. If we went back 20 years, whether it's in high school or whether it's in her early movies, Angelina Jolie would not be who we would pick as the successful archetype for celebrity diplomacy.

Whatever you think of her private life, as a celebrity diplomat she hasn't made a faulty move. Working for the UN on refugee issues, she has pushed the envelope on a lot of cases that would scare most diplomats. She went to Baghdad and talked about the plight of refugees in Iraq when this issue was not given much publicity. She criticized Thailand for its treatment of Muslim minority would-be refugees. This is a very interesting case. So even though Namibia, Burris, and adoptions get some of the attention, we should not fail to see that she is a very successful representative

for the UN.

There are obstacles, however. There is always the risk of developing fatigue. Bono talks about this. But 9/11 didn't push off celebrity diplomacy and the recession certainly has pushed celebrities into perhaps more local issues.



But the Obama era seems to be reflowering celebrity diplomacy. Every week, there's a new column, as many in the room would know, about the role of celebrities. President Obama doesn't seem to mind having celebrities play a huge role. There are lots of clips of President Obama with the celebrities that I'm talking about.

Whatever we think, and there're going to be differences between good and bad assessments, we have to take them seriously. Indeed, I think this should be the debate that we have today.

Douglas Kellner: Good morning. I have some comments today on Andrew's new book, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, which is published by Paradigm Press, that also published my 2005 book *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*. I'm going to comment on both Andrew's book and give my own analysis to supplement his account of celebrity diplomacy by drawing on my work in *Media Spectacle*.

In an era where media culture is arguably at the center of politics, both in elections and governing, it is not surprising that celebrity diplomacy is growing in scope and perhaps significance. Andrew Cooper is to be congratulated for writing the first book that I'm aware of that investigates in detail the history, forms and consequences of growing celebrity diplomacy.

Moreover, Andrew raises questions concerning its relation to traditional diplomacy; whether



Audrey Hepburn as
UNICEF ambassador



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it has largely positive or negative effects or, as I will argue, if it is highly ambiguous and hard to generalize about or praise in good/bad dichotomies at this time.

In framing his subject, Andrew details the history of celebrity diplomacy, making it clear that it's been around for a long time. Hollywood stars like Audrey Hepburn, Gregory Peck and Danny Kaye promoted global issues and associated their celebrity with social and global problems, mostly in work with the UN. Of course, Princess Diana, however briefly, became the most publicized celebrity diplomat of a certain era before her tragic death.

Christopher did a fantastic job of giving a historical background and overview of celebrity diplomacy in the U.S. since World War II up to the present.

The other virtue of Andrew's book is that he carries out well-documented and extremely interesting case studies of Bono's and Bob Geldof's interventions. And there's also a great chapter on Davos and the World Economic Forum as a site of celebrity diplomacy – where diplomats, politicians and intellectuals come together to publicize global issues.

While Andrew is generally intrigued with celebrity diplomacy – as I am as a student of media culture – he also calls attention to its defects, such as celebrities deflecting attention from more serious diplomatic efforts or informed professionals on issues. He's aware of the dangers of amateurism and of celebrities blundering and discrediting good causes. He stresses the concentration of celebrity diplomacy in the North rather than the South. Although there's a good chapter on celebrity diplomacy moving beyond the Anglosphere and examples of emerging celebrity



diplomats from Africa, Bollywood, and other non-Western sites. I'm going to talk today about an emergence of celebrity diplomacy from Latin America.

In fact, I would like to suggest how a politician's celebrity can aid diplomacy by calling attention to the phenomena of Barack Obama. The book is pre-Obama, so I'm going to suggest the ways Obama adds to Andrew's narrative.

Obama won the presidency, at least in part, because of his effectiveness at mobilizing media spectacle and making himself a celebrity. This was whether on the campaign trail, through the Internet – including YouTube videos like “Obama Girl” and “Yes, We Can” – as well as circulating videos of his speeches on the Internet, complemented by other videos made by Obama's often young supporters. All of these efforts produced images of Obama as a global celebrity.

By the end of the long presidential campaign, Obama emerged as a celebrity of the highest order, receiving rock star adulation wherever he went. I want to be bold enough to argue that Obama is now the world's super global celebrity, bar none. We'll discuss how he's been using this to promote his agenda.

Both during the campaign and now as president, Obama has used his super-celebrity status to engage in public diplomacy for his agenda. In fact, his phenomenal popularity, after bitter anger throughout the world at the Bush-Cheney administration, is a positive antidote to what was rising and dangerous anti-Americanism. It provides him leverage as a global diplomat to promote his agendas.

After Obama's recent trips to Europe, the U.K., France, Trinidad and other places, Obama has been leveraging his celebrity to engage in a form of celebrity diplomacy.



Princess Diana



...in the contemporary era of media spectacle, effective politicians need to become global celebrities to effectively promote national interests or deal with global issues.

-Douglas Kellner

I would argue that in the contemporary era of media spectacle, effective politicians need to become global celebrities to effectively promote national interests or deal with global issues.

Andrew notes how Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela have used their superstar celebrity status to promote global issues and engage in celebrity diplomacy after their terms of office. In the current era of escalating media spectacle, we'll see more politicians, both active and retired, as celebrity politicians and diplomats using their celebrity status and access to the media as an instrument to push through their issues or agendas.

Andrew is generally positive in his appraisal of celebrity diplomacy, whether it comes about through entertainers or celebrity politicians. I, for the most part, agree with him.

There's not really much in Andrew's book about the Bush-Cheney administration. I would argue that the Bush-Cheney administration's failed unilateral and highly centralized diplomacy – or anti-diplomacy, if you prefer – shows the need for a broad range of diplomatic efforts to grapple with global problems, ranging from official national and global institutions and diplomats to NGOs to celebrity diplomats.

More than ever, there's a global awareness of environmental crisis, poverty, global health problems, and issues around food, agriculture, water and the ecosystem itself. As well, there are problems concerning political refugees, starvation and localized political problems – problems so enormous that they need multiple efforts, including celebrity diplomacy.

Whatever you think of Chavez's politics or his tactics, it's clear that he is a master of media spectacle and celebrity politics.

-Douglas Kellner

I would argue that that's part of the mix. We need standard politicians and celebrity helps people like Obama deal with these problems. We need NGOs, conventional traditional diplomacy, but also celebrity diplomacy.

Now, as noted, Obama's recent world tours and meetings with European and Latin American leaders shows how politicians are becoming major celebrities all over the world and how celebrity politics is becoming normalized as an important, perhaps key, segment of global and regional politics.

Look at last week's meeting in Trinidad with leaders of the Americas; it's clear that celebrity politics has come to dominate the world stage. The major superstar in Latin America for the last 50 years is Fidel Castro, who's obviously a celebrity superstar diplomat. We now see that Hugo Chavez has been following Fidel's use of the media and production of political spectacle. Whatever you think of Chavez's politics or his tactics, it's clear that he is a master of media spectacle and celebrity politics.



In his trip to the UN a couple of years ago, he appeared after George W. Bush and roamed around the stage saying that he detected the smell of sulfur, that perhaps the devil had just been there. He took some slams at the Bush administration which, whether you think of this as diplomacy or behavior, was great political theater and great performance art that got global media attention.

And likewise, Chavez's gesture over the weekend of giving Obama a copy of Eduardo Galeano's book on U.S. imperialism in Latin America, and getting a picture of Obama smiling and shaking hands with him was another great example of political theater.

I saw this morning on the BBC Web site that Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America: Five*



Centuries of Pillage of a Continent, which was ranked 54,000th on the Amazon sales chart of booksellers, is now up to number two.

Chavez earlier held up a Noam Chomsky book that also shot up the bestseller list. So whatever you think of Chavez's politics, he's obviously the world's number-one book promoter.

Noting other leaders with Obama in Trinidad, there's quite a few Latin American politicians who are celebrity politicians who have used their celebrity to advance their agendas: Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, Lula of Brazil, Avo Morales of Bolivia and others. They have all used media spectacle to create and promote a populist agenda and to make them very popular, both regionally and in their country. To some extent, Obama is following that model as a populist politician using media spectacle to promote his agenda.

My last point, this was initially supposed to be a debate where Andrew argued for media spectacle celebrity politics, and I was supposed to argue against it, But I indicated to Geoff that I didn't want to argue against something that I believed in.

I do have a worry about celebrity diplomacy and politics. I suggest that a major defect would be that celebrity diplomacy and politics contributes to the culture of celebrity where our idols, our role models, and ideals are constructed solely by media images and spectacle.

I've suggested this is the case in politics, alluding to Obama as a global super celebrity and Andrew's analysis of Bill Clinton, who has become a global super celebrity and thus potentially effective global celebrity diplomat.



President Barack Obama with
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

In the world of media spectacle, there may be pressure for politicians – as well as celebrity diplomats – to substitute spectacle for substance and engage in symbolic politics rather than the hard work of diplomatic policy formations and debate, compromise and the laborious work of implementation.

There may be pressure for politicians – as well as celebrity diplomats – to substitute spectacle for substance and engage in symbolic politics rather than the hard work of diplomatic policy formations and debate.

-Douglas Kellner

On the other hand, a politician's celebrity or celebrity diplomacy that Andrew has analyzed can help push through progressive policies. Celebrity may be a vital aid to policy wonkishness, traditional politics and diplomacy in this media age. But it may still have positive effects, as well as potentially negative ones. On that ambiguous note, I shall end.

Christopher Smith: Thank you, gentlemen.

I want to pick up on one of the themes that Doug Kellner raised, which was about Obama and the cult of celebrities surrounding him. In the class on celebrity and politics that I taught for the Communication Management masters students at Annenberg, we had the good fortune of talking about this while the campaign was coming to a head. It was one of those convenient teaching moments that you yearn for.



We talked about the huge crowds that followed Obama and how Obama's opponents politically used notions of the crowd as a way of reducing his stature relative to that level of support.

I'm not sure if some of the things you were talking about fit in with that version of spectacle. That version of spectacle is very clear. Obama's use of social media generated his cult of celebrity. Very recently over tax weekend, when we were all racing to turn in our taxes, Ashton Kutcher was racing to be the first person on Twitter with a million followers.

He challenged CNN, which he deemed to be representative of the old media and old

political guard, to a duel: Who would be the first to get to a million followers? And he won! We could have a recount perhaps, but he ostensibly won.



I want to shift the question away from the old media version of spectacle and how it generated political support. Instead, I want to speak specifically to the use of new social media and social technology.

Douglas Kellner: Right. We are in the era of multimedia and social networking. The crowds that Obama attracted, that you mentioned, Christopher, made for a very good TV spectacle but also made for very good Internet spectacle. Obama was the first guy to get a million Facebook friends and they circulated videos to those friends everyday.

Twitter was used by the Obama people to circulate messages and to call attention to all kinds of events and material on Obama's Web site.

I think Obama effectively used all forms and forums of new media, but it was really grounded in almost the rock star spectacle of live events. He was able to really draw a crowd and perform, and this translated into new media circulation that his supporters used very effectively via social networking. It made him more and more of a celebrity every day.

Christopher Smith: Andrew Cooper, I know you have some prepared thoughts. Do you think the development around and popularity of Twitter will shift the relationship between celebrities and state diplomats? Will they change places in terms of importance?

Andrew Cooper: I think there are two tests. One is the test of flexibility. Celebrities are trying to catch up to things that are going on around them. Bob

With Bono blogging for The New York Times, Angelina Jolie going with Jeff Sachs to Africa and using MTV, they draw a bigger crowd and bigger demographics.

-Andrew Cooper

Geldof was the first person to do breakfast television in the UK. But that seems a long time ago.



Now, with Bono blogging for *The New York Times*, Angelina Jolie going with Jeff Sachs to Africa and using MTV, they draw a bigger crowd and bigger demographics.

Coming back to Doug's work, there is also the test of spectacle. I think this comes back to your point about Obama. He can fill a stadium, right? He can fill it and have an overflow crowd. When you look at the true test of celebrity – this is the test that the real celebrities pass or fail – Bono can fill a stadium.

People outside the narrow definition of celebrity I've used, whether it's John Paul II or the Dalai Lama, they, too, can fill a stadium. This gives them a very potent opportunity to use the new flexibility of the media combined with a large scale theater. It's an amazing combination.



Angelina Jolie in Afghanistan

Christopher Smith: So I guess Ashton Kutcher won't be a diplomat any time soon. I doubt he could fill a stadium. He might have a million followers, but I don't think could actually fill the stadium – if that's the test.

Douglas Kellner: Let me add a couple of criteria here. In addition to filling the stadium, you have to get images of it out into mainstream media, like television. For politics, you need to circulate it through multimedia to create real political celebrity that can translate into power.

Christopher Smith: Quickly moving on to one of Andrew's other points: Bono's cause of choice is debt relief and the economist Dambisa Moyo has recently published a book called *Dead Aid*, in which she critiques Bono and other global North and Western celebrity figures for crowding out voices that might emerge from the global South.



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on good issues, the better. I
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or zero-sum game.*

-Douglas Kellner

Doug, you talked about some elements of that with your references to Latin America. What do you make of her argument about the negative impact of celebrity posturing? What has actually done for African fortunes?

Andrew Cooper: I think ownership is a big issue here. I praise Bono for his type of mentorship. His circle is not only Anglo/U.K./Irish/U.S.-oriented. There are so many barriers – not just for Africans but also Latin Americans and South Asians – to break into that type of magic circle. For example, Geldof does a major concert and only invites one African performer.

Unfortunately, many of the states in the South don't encourage this type of activity. And amongst the potential players, there's a degree of opportunism.

For example, you break out somebody through the UN system. George Weah is a good example. He was a football player and soccer player of the year in Europe in 1995 playing for a very famous Italian team. He went back to Liberia as a UN goodwill ambassador and almost overnight declared himself a presidential candidate.

This is the problem when you elevate somebody. He has got lots of fame. He's a good person. He seems to have done a good job for the UN, but he wants more than that. He wants to win the zero-sum game that many of the elections in the South are. He comes fairly close to winning. Luckily or unluckily, he doesn't win. But it shows that you can leverage that celebrity status in all sorts of unanticipated, opportunistic ways.

Douglas Kellner: In Andrew's Davos chapter, he has some comments on the world's social forum that's more Southern, more a developing country's alternative

to the Davos conference, which has used celebrity politicians and other celebrities to promote more progressive agendas on labor rights, human rights, ecological issues, etcetera.

It was very effective during the Bush years of blocking U.S. control of the World Bank and other conferences. As for the critique of Bono, I would follow Chairman Mao Tse-tung and say, "Let a thousand flowers bloom." The more diplomacy you have on good issues, the better. I don't think it's an either/or or zero-sum game. There could be pitfalls and problems and failed celebrity diplomacy. But to stigmatize someone like Bono who's promoted so many positive cultural values seems unfair.



George Clooney at the UN

Christopher Smith: Before I open it up to the floor, I would like to come back to Andrew Cooper and posit one of the possible limits of celebrity diplomacy: the resurgence of the state as a planning mechanism for positive social economic outcomes in the world. For a long time we thought we didn't need nation-states anymore. But now in the wake of this financial crisis, even the United States realizes it needs a government that works on behalf of the people.

Nevertheless, non-state actors – whether regarding nuclear proliferation or the issue of piracy off the Somali coast – generate so much of what is salient to geopolitical debates. What might celebrity diplomacy have to say about that?

Andrew Cooper: There are many issues about recession or depression, but the push is to go local. This is a very valid response, and you see this playing out now.

If you follow websites about George Clooney and Darfur, they're saying, "We've got problems here. Why is George always spending time in Darfur when he should be spending time in Michigan or California?" This is a natural response.



This is also one of the really engaging aspects of celebrity diplomacy; that despite this pressure to go local, go parochial, the top celebrities have maintained that sense of globalism.

Christopher Smith: Brad Pitt did move to New Orleans.

Andrew Cooper: Exactly. This is a good test because Brad Pitt was obviously mentored.

I've got a photo of Brad with Jamie Drummond, co-founder of the the advocacy organization, DATA. Jamie's explaining things to Brad.

Brad Pitt seems to have a genuine interest and capability on architectural questions, urban renewal questions, Downtown L.A., all sorts of things. New Orleans probably is a better niche.

Of course, with a partner like Angelina, maybe you can say that the rest of the world is covered without him playing that role.

Christopher Smith: What might a celebrity's role be in reaching out to non-state actors who generate so much volatility in the world order? Do they have a role there, or is that where their role ends?

Douglas Kellner: Let me give a theoretical answer to your previous question about what do pirates and non-state actors and global celebrities signify. Then I'll answer your second.

From a standpoint of power, we're seeing a postmodern dispersion of power. While in the modern era, it was the state or capital or big institution, like the UN that had

Despite this pressure to go local, go parochial, the top celebrities have maintained that sort of sense of globalism.

-Andrew Cooper

power. Now we're seeing a more multi-polar world with new centers of power, non-state actors, celebrities, pirates, etcetera. This can be good or this can be bad depending on what the issue and what the intervention is.

In terms of the world economic crisis, celebrities like Brad Pitt in Louisiana can certainly try to produce jobs and rebuild houses. You can have micro-politics dealing with economic crises on a local level with celebrity or local group mobilization. Just as you can have Obama giving millions of dollars through stimulus packages or the International Monetary Fund disbursing money.

Again, in a postmodern world, there could be multiple solutions to political problems and multiple actors. It's not just the old state ones.



Andrew Cooper: On the topic of celebrity criticism: What intrigues me is the difference across the Atlantic in terms of who criticizes celebrities. It comes to the crux of your last question.

In the United States, it tends to be conservatives who don't like celebrities. They're "liberal Hollywood." All of the words like "universalism" and "transnationalism" – that Fox News doesn't like – these are the things that celebrities embrace. They go beyond a simplistic notion of national interest. In this regard, they have a lot of credibility because they're global stars with a global reach.

In Europe, it's the left that doesn't like celebrities because of exactly what you're saying: They crowd out NGOs, and, particularly, they crowd out small NGOs. They have big campaigns; they have the rallies. They do things that put civil society off balance like announcing things before G8s. There's a lot of tension from that.



Brad Pitt in New Orleans

Matthew Hinton / AFP / Getty Images



The only NGOs that really like celebrities are ones that are big enough to embrace the celebrities themselves. I use the example again of Oxfam. Oxfam uses celebrities extremely well for fundraising, for profile, and has somewhat of a similar culture as celebrities.

It shows that there's a cultural duality. It's not just at the G20 on stimulus versus regulation; it's on all sorts of other issues that you get this type of duality.

Christopher Smith: Thank you, gentlemen, very much. Any questions from the floor?

Unidentified Audience Participant: I'd like to expand on the question of diplomacy. If diplomacy is another word for somebody acting in the international sphere and in the conduct of foreign policy, my question is: Whose foreign policy are these people acting out?

Obviously and in some cases, they're working for an international organization. Sometimes it's for an NGO, sometimes for a nation state, and sometimes they seem to have a foreign policy all of their own, which merely overlaps at some points with the foreign policy of an NGO.

I was also struck by the idea that a celebrity could be an anti-diplomat and actually argue against the engagement of their country with the rest of the world. An example of this would be Charles Lindbergh trying to keep America out of World War II and speaking up for the appeasement of Hitler.

We can usefully subdivide our celebrities and start to create a taxonomy of the most dangerous people – the Charles Lindberghs – who are sources of charismatic power

but aren't using that power in any kind of legitimate or logical statecraft of any kind.

Andrew Cooper: This hits upon historical public policy and public diplomacy. At one time, you had a choice whether you embraced the state or not, right? Ben Franklin embraces the state, goes off to France and becomes an ambassador – probably one of the first real global celebrities.



Then you've got a sort of anti-diplomacy, as embodied in the actions of someone like Lawrence of Arabia and other people who work against or are bothered by what their state is doing.

It's theoretically complex because Bono is described as having a state of his own. He's certainly outgrown Ireland. There's no way that he's a proxy for an Irish state in the world. Bono is bigger than Ireland, even in the tough *Celtic Tiger* days. Bono has that reach.

You see this among business people as well. Ted Turner said he should have bought a South Pacific island when he had lots of money because then that would've gotten him access to the UN. He'd actually be able to run a country and have sovereign rights.

But Bono is bigger even than that because you can't really identify him with any one single issue. He's a universal phenomenon. He knows how to play different diplomatic games at different times. He knows how to charm the conservatives within the United States. This is why he makes this amazing transition from Bill Clinton. One wouldn't have been able to see Bono moving beyond Clinton, but all of a sudden George W. Bush embraces Bono. And that is probably the one big success of Bush – his HIV/AIDS funding. It was very generous, though there was certainly some criticism, but in terms of pure money. In a retrospective analysis of that project – globally, it does seem to have been successful for policy.



Bill Clinton in Liberia



Then there is the famous image of Bono making Jesse Helms cry. Nobody makes Jesse Helms cry. But Bono reads scriptures to him, takes him to a U2 concert. Jesse thinks this is some sort of revival meeting. In Bono's hands, this is a fantastic component.

Christopher Smith: We have another question here.

Unidentified Audience Participant: I appreciate the overview of what's going on among the top celebrities who are the most involved. But I'm curious how you assess their effectiveness given that there are probably many more who are less popular engaged in this sort of activity. Are they effective? Is this done mostly for publicity, or are they actually achieving what they've set out to do?

Secondly, how do you rate the effectiveness of celebrities who are off on their own versus those who are appointed, say, by the U.S. government – like a Michelle Kwan for example?

Andrew Cooper: The second part of the question is much easier to deal with than the first. But I think there should be an institute or an NGO that would make this one of their priorities. There are assessments for G8, for G20. Why shouldn't there be a celebrity assessment exercise and hold these celebrities to the promises that they make? The DATA organization has moved in those ways themselves. They certainly make assessments of countries. People have not made those qualitative assessments of celebrities themselves.

Unidentified Audience Participant: The RED campaign was recently criticized by *Rolling Stone* for not using the money for what it was supposed to be used for.

Andrew Cooper: Exactly. I think RED highlighted deficiencies and brought out

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-Andrew Cooper

a backlash against Bono. It used to be only Geldof that got that type of criticism. There's a Teflon effect with Bono. No one had really taken him on.

The combination of Bono being a sensible businessperson on tax policies and some of his ventures in Silicon Valley, plus the RED ordeal, brought up a well of criticism. Unfortunately for Bono, the RED campaign hasn't been successful. There's now increasing opaqueness about the accounting on the RED campaign.

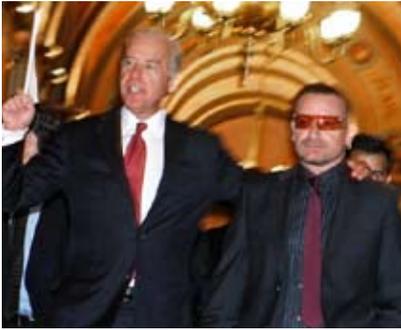
Christopher Smith: One more question.

Unidentified Audience Participant: My question is more for Professor Cooper. I'm a first-year public diplomacy student. Recently, we had Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor here who spoke about the global reach of Bollywood. You mentioned the burgeoning celebrity diplomacy from Bollywood stars. Could you speak more about what kind of causes celebrity diplomats from Bollywood are getting into? Does it mimic Hollywood or are they involved in different sorts of causes?



Andrew Cooper: The most press coverage I ever got was from doing a couple of interviews in India and saying Bollywood actors should be used as celebrity diplomats. This created a huge amount of publicity because there is confidence in India that "we should be able to do exactly what other people are doing."

We don't just need the George Clooneys. The U.S. has people and India has people. Shashi spoke about *Big B* of Bollywood, right? Amitabh Bachchan. In Syria, the only pictures that can be as big as pictures of Syrian President Assad are Big B pictures. Big B is huge. His son, everybody in the family is huge. Unfortunately, it's the George Weah syndrome. The family has all gone into domestic politics. Big B, himself, went into parliament and got into some



Bono with Vice President Joseph Biden

Mark Wilson/Getty Images

sort of local “difficulties,” as they call it.

There is also a big anti-diplomatic theme in India. We can see it from a number of writers who are very critical of the Indian state.



We’ve still got far to go, but there is this. I call it the IBSA phenomenon. There are three big robust democracies – India, Brazil, South Africa – and they all have amazing capacity on the business side and on the cultural side to make that splash.

Christopher Smith: Doug Kellner, you have the last word.

Douglas Kellner: I wanted to respond to the question of the celebrity as anti-diplomat – Lindburgh as the negative example. There are also positive examples of celebrities being anti-diplomat. Actually, much of what Bob Geldof has done is anti-diplomacy. You present Harry Belafonte as a failed diplomat, whereas I see him as an activist. Sean Penn, as well.

To answer your question about how to appraise the effect of some of this celebrity diplomacy and activism: Bush was discredited in part because of the anti-Bush celebrity activism of many people who opposed his Iraq policy, his environmentalism. This helped Obama, the anti-Bush. There was anti-McCain celebrity activism, which is a little different from celebrity diplomacy.

Christopher Smith: I’d like to thank both of our respondents. If you have any other questions, you can speak with them during the coffee break. Thank you.

You present Harry Belafonte as a failed diplomat, whereas I see him as an activist.

-Douglas Kellner