

Celebrity Colonialism: Transnational Media and Social Activism

Global Village Living-Learning Center Course Proposal
Spring-Serenity Duvall, School of Journalism

Course Description

Recent elections, natural disasters, and wars have brought celebrities from around the world to the forefront of the political process to an unprecedented degree. While some have been elected to public office in Britain, India, and the US, others have been prominent supporters on campaign trails or have headlined fundraisers, voting campaigns, disaster relief efforts, and served as United Nations ambassadors. A small number of celebrities from the US, India, Australia, Britain, Ireland, South America, Africa, and more, have made activism almost a second career; garnering as much media attention for their efforts to “save the world” as to sell tickets. Especially since September 11, 2001, media pundits, political experts, and researchers have spent no small amount of time and effort debating the influence of celebrities on political and humanitarian processes.



The relationship between celebrity and politics has a long history and a global scope that calls for an in-depth investigation of the cultural foundations and implications of celebrity politics. British journalist Brendan O’Neill coined the term “celebrity colonialism” to describe the relationship between western celebrities and third world politics. In this course, we will examine English language texts such as popular media, documentary films, news media, and social theory that constructs, critiques, and sustains celebrity colonialism. In so doing, we will engage with celebrity theory from media studies, cultural studies, gender studies, history, political science, as well as philosophy. This course is meant to fulfill an Arts and Humanities requirement.

Learning Objectives

Each class period will be designed to address a specific topic as well as encourage specific levels of learning: knowledge acquisition and comprehension, application and analysis of ideas, and synthesis and evaluation of information. To this end, we will use a combination of mini-lectures, analysis of multi-media examples (film, advertising, television, music, etc.), discussion of readings, and written participation to better understand celebrity colonialism. The emphasis will be on experiential learning, so you will be encouraged to actively engage with the course material by taking it out of the classroom and applying it to your own media consumption.

- Goal 1: Knowledge and Comprehension
 - You will be provided with a strong background in relevant celebrity, media, nationalism, and social movement theory as a foundation for understanding celebrity politics.

- Goal 2: Application and Analysis
 - You will learn to use theory and critical methods to examine popular and news media constructions of celebrity colonialism
- Goal 3: Synthesis and Evaluation
 - You will gain the tools to a) critically evaluate a broad range of media content, beyond the scope of celebrity colonialism and b) to synthesize theory, media, and your own ideas in reporting your evaluations.

Readings and Films

One to two readings will be assigned for each class meeting and should be completed before the class period for which they are scheduled. Each required book will be available for purchase and will be placed on reserve in at least one IU Library; all other readings will be handed out in class or posted on Oncourse. Please bring the readings to class with you as these will serve as a basis for discussion and participation.

Readings from the following books will be supplemented periodically with academic articles and popular press articles that address celebrity politics. (For example, readings for one class period may be: one book chapter with one magazine article). As savvy media users, I believe you have likely encountered news and popular media discussions of celebrity politics, so early in the semester I will invite you to suggest articles for course readings.



Books

Roman Espejo. (2009). *Can celebrities change the world?* Detroit: Greenhaven Press.

Liesbet van Zoonen (2005). *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge.* Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield.

Robert Clarke (2009). *Celebrity Colonialism: Fame, Representation and Power in (Post)Colonial Cultures.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Articles

Lisa Brooten, "The Feminization of Democracy Under Siege: The Media, the 'Lady of Burma,' and U.S. Foreign Policy," *NWSA Journal*, 17 no. 3 (2005): 134-156, p.135.

Richard Dyer. "Charisma." *Stardom: Industry of desire.* Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: Routledge, 1993. 57-59.

Inderpal Grewal. "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11."

- Social Identities*, 9 no. 4 (2003): 535-561.
- Tom Junod, "Angelina Jolie Dies for Our Sins." *Esquire* (July 2007): 78-85, 134.
- Jaideep Mukherjee. "Celebrity, Media and Politics: An Indian Perspective," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 57, no. 1 (2004): 80-92.
- Brendan O'Neill, "Brad, Angelina and the rise of 'celebrity colonialism,'" *Spiked*, www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/printable/327/, 2006.
- Donald J. Puchala, "World hegemony and the United Nations," *International Studies Review*, 7 (2005): 571-584. p. 572.
- Raka Shome, "White femininity and the discourse of the nation: Re/membering Princess Diana," *Feminist Media Studies*, 1, no. 3 (2001): 323-342.
- John Street, "Bob, Bono and Tony B: the popular artist as politician," *Media, Culture & Society*, 24 (2002): 433-441.
- John Street "Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2004): 435-452

Documentary films

- A place in time*. (2007). Angelina Jolie, Director.
- The 11th Hour*. (2008) Warner Bros. Entertainment
- Sand and sorrow: A new documentary about Darfur*, (2008). Bradley Kaplan; Paul Freedman; George Clooney; John Prendergast; Samantha Power; Nicholas D. Kristof; HBO Documentary Films.



Assignments and Grading

The purpose of your assignments will be to emphasize the synthesis of knowledge – to integrate class material and discussion with your own ideas in order to help you more fully understand celebrity colonialism. The most effective way to achieve a higher level of learning is through writing, so assignments will be written papers, a written media journal, and short answer reading responses; your final project will be EITHER a paper OR a multi-media project.

Your grade will be based on class participation/media journal, reading responses, two short papers, and one final project. Detailed handouts and reviews will be provided for all assignments.

ASSIGNMENT	WEIGHT	POINTS	DUE DATE
Participation/Media journal	20 %	200	Every class
Paper 1	15 %	150	Week five
Reading responses	25 %	250	One per week (total 13)
Paper 2	15 %	150	Week ten
Final project	25 %	250	Finals week
TOTAL	100%	1000	

Participation: Your participation grade will be based on several factors and will be calculated and handed out at mid-term and the end of the semester. Full participation takes into consideration:

- Your media journal, in which you will evaluate media representations of celebrity politics that you encounter outside of class. I will provide you with a couple of questions to answer for each media item you examine. You should expect to have at least one entry per week and will bring your journal to class to use during group discussions.
- Your discussion of the readings in class
- Your response to the questions I raise during lecture
- Your comments and questions for guest speakers
- Your response to video segments
- Your attendance. Attendance at every class period is expected – meaning that you should arrive on time and remain for the entire class period. Attendance will be taken and will factor into your participation grade. Absences will also impact your performance on the papers because you may catch up on readings, but you will miss the discussions that would enhance your understanding of the course material. You would also miss video clips and other material shown in class that are not available elsewhere.
 - If you miss class and need to catch up on material or discuss what you missed, please come to office hours or set up an appointment to meet with me.
 - If you will require accommodation for religious observances, please submit a university request form at least two weeks prior to the absence.

Papers: You will complete two papers over the course of the semester, each worth 15 percent of your grade. *Detailed instructions and examples will be provided for each paper.* Each paper will be 4 to 6 double-spaced pages in 12pt Times New Roman font. Full source citation is required. *Late papers will not be accepted without prior permission from the instructor.*

- Paper 1: This paper gives you an opportunity to discuss three secondary sources related to celebrity colonialism, celebrity politics, and/or celebrity activism.

- Paper 2: Building on Paper 1, this paper will ask you to critically examine an activist, political, or humanitarian organization that works with celebrities (such as Global Green USA partnering with Brad Pitt or Shakira working with the United Nations).

Reading Responses: Thirteen short-answer reading responses will be due over the course of the semester, with the lowest grade thrown out. You will be given handouts with questions to consider while completing assigned reading and your responses will answer those questions. The goal of this assignment is to foster reading comprehension, so students will be fully supported and prepared to write the responses during class time.



Final Project: As a student-centered course you will have a choice of an individual or group final projects and a choice of writing a final paper or creating a multi-media report. Each will consist of reviewing relevant literature and analyzing celebrity colonialism in media text, audience, or production. *Detailed instructions and examples will be provided for project.*

- Working individually or in groups, you will conduct a media analysis of popular or news media related to celebrity colonialism. Each project will include a review of literature and a critique of the representation of celebrity colonialism, politics, activism, or humanitarianism.
- Working together, we will decide whether you will write a paper (10-12 pages for individuals, 20-25 pages for groups) or to create a multi-media project that reports findings.
- Again, to clarify, you will conduct an individual OR a group project and will write a paper OR create a multi-media report.

Grading: In keeping with my overall objective to foster your understanding of the course material, the grading process will be as transparent as possible. Each assignment will include a handout detailing the expectations of the assignment and the weighting of points to be distributed. The rubric used to grade each assignment will be available to every student prior to starting the assignment and will be returned with detailed feedback when a grade is given. You will be assessed in part on:

- Clarity and precision of writing
- Evidence of strong comprehension of readings
- Insightful media analysis
- Productive contributions to class discussion

Course Policies

What follows are just a few items that I believe are important to creating a collegial classroom environment; your ideas of what make for productive, enjoyable class meetings are also key to the success of the course. Therefore, on the first day of class I will ask each student to offer suggestions for course policies and will post the results so that we may all benefit.

Bring your readings to class: Please remember to bring your relevant readings to class because we will work regularly on questions and class exercises that relate to the assigned readings.

Mature and professional behavior in the classroom: Some of the issues discussed in class may be controversial or challenging. I encourage you to approach our discussions with a spirit of openness and tolerance. I will encourage a great amount of discussion and interaction in this class, and I expect students to interact with each other in a mature and respectful fashion.

Academic misconduct: Plagiarism and other academic misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in severe consequences for your final grade or an automatic grade of F for the course. Please refer to the *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities and Conduct* of your Schedule of Classes for the definitions and procedures concerning academic misconduct.

About the Instructor

Spring-Serenity Duvall is a doctoral candidate in the Indiana University School of Journalism with a minor in Gender Studies. Her dissertation examines constructions of gender, race, globalization, and power in popular and news media coverage of celebrity activism. As a critical cultural scholar, she is committed to conducting interdisciplinary research and combines her research and teaching interests by serving as instructor for media studies courses that address gender, race, class and sexuality in media; youth and media; and media ethics, power, and politics. She recently visited New Harmony, Indiana, and was very disappointed that the tour guide wouldn't let her touch the hundred-year-old printing press.



Tentative Schedule of Topics

WEEK ONE / Introduction to celebrity colonialism

- *Key points:* What is celebrity colonialism and what is the role of media in constructing it? Trends in celebrity activism and major debates concerning the role of activism in social change.
- *Reading response due:* What are some popular social issues for celebrities to become activists on behalf of?

WEEK TWO / Social movement theory

- *Key points:* What is the difference between activism, politics, and humanitarianism? How have social movements utilized celebrities and media to advance awareness and change?
- *Reading response:* Why do celebrities align themselves more with some social issues than others?
- *Handout:* Detailed instructions for Paper 1, with example.

WEEK THREE / Celebrity theory

- *Key points:* Creation of celebrity as a function of modernity, changing understanding and role of celebrity in contemporary society.
- *Reading response:* Why are celebrities an essential element of modern society?

WEEK FOUR / Behind the scenes: History of world celebrity politics, 1900 - 1960

- *Key points:* Early Hollywood involvement in world politics, cross-cultural comparison with Europe during WWI, WWII, and Cold War.
- *Reading response:* How were celebrities an integral component of international relations during this time period?



WEEK FIVE / Activists take the stage: History of world celebrity politics, 1960 - 1980

- *Key points:* Celebrity involvement in counter-culture movements, anti-war protests, and civil/womens rights movements.
- *Reading response:* How did the role of celebrities in politics shift during this time period and why?
- **Paper #1 due**

WEEK SIX / Live Aid, Farm Aid: Celebrities benefit global AIDS and poverty, 1980-2001

- *Key points:* Celebrity activists became focused on fund raising and awareness raising campaigns rather than anti-establishment efforts.
- *Reading response:* What was the significance of Ronald Reagan's election to US presidency?

WEEK SEVEN / September 11, 2001: Transnational celebrity and the "war on terror"

- *Key points:* Celebrity actions in response to World Trade Center attacks and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; Audience reactions to celebrity displays of nationalism.
- *Reading response:* Why did audiences reaction very passionately to celebrity actions in response to 9/11 and the "war of terrorism"?
- *Handout:* Detailed instructions for Paper 2, with example.

WEEK EIGHT / Globalization of media and consumerism

- *Key points:* Promotion of global socially conscious consumerism
- *Reading response:* What does consumerism ultimately support?

WEEK NINE / Celebrity colonialism case study #1: Can Bono save the world?

- *Key points:* Irish rocker Bono's use of media to promote his activist agenda and his use of Judeo-Christian tropes to discuss Third World.
- *Reading response:* How does media representation of Bono demonstrate celebrity colonialism?

WEEK TEN / Nationalism and nation-building

- *Key points:* Media's role in creating "imagined communities" that promote nationalism.
- **Paper #2 due**

WEEK ELEVEN / Case study # 2: Country music showdown, Dixie Chicks versus Toby Keith

- *Key points:* Controversy over whether celebrities should criticize US foreign policy, portrayal of Arabic people/nations in media.
- *Reading response:* How did US celebrity characterizations of the "war on terror" differ from celebrities of other countries?



WEEK TWELVE / Transnational feminist solidarity: Celebrity coalition building

- *Key points:* Practice of feminism as it differs across cultures; role of celebrities in promoting women's issues and feminism.
- *Reading response:* Why do feminists in the Third World find Western feminism problematic?
- *Handout:* Detailed instructions for Final Project, with examples.

WEEK THIRTEEN / Case study #3: "Brangelina" in the Third World

- *Key points:* Performance of celebrity colonialism through travel, media, and adoption.
- *Reading response:* Why did Brangelina inspire the term "celebrity colonialism."

WEEK FOURTEEN / Sports and politics

- *Key points:* Sport as performance of nationalism; Olympics during WWII and Cold War.
- *Reading response:* How has the Olympics been politicized over time?

WEEK FIFTEEN / Case study #4: Ambassadors of football (soccer)

- *Key points:* Sport celebrities in politics; Football campaign against racism; Sport celebrities' humanitarian campaigns.
- *Reading response:* How do sport celebrities perform and/or challenge celebrity colonialism?

WEEK SIXTEEN / Student final project presentations

WEEK SEVENTEEN / Final Exam Week – FINAL PROJECTS DUE