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# Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens

by JULIE WILSON

**Abstract:** When Danny Kaye became goodwill ambassador for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1954, a process was set in motion that brought media industries, stars, and the United Nations into dynamic relationship and birthed a new concept of celebrity diplomacy. This essay historicizes the rise of contemporary celebrity diplomats like Bono and Angelina Jolie by theorizing how the stardom of Kaye came to function as sentimental education, that is, as a tool for teaching Western audiences about their emotional bonds and moral obligations to distant populations. In turn, through Kaye's performances as "Mr. UNICEF," stardom emerged as a potent cultural technology of citizen shaping for global governing.

For the past decade U2 front man Bono has been a regular on Capitol Hill and at the White House. Known as "the Pest" in some Republican circles in Washington, DC, the pop star has spent much of his free time between tours lobbying Congress on matters of debt relief and foreign aid for developing countries. Perhaps Bono's most famous political feat in this regard was making Jesse Helms cry. In September 2000, Bono held private talks with the rabidly right-wing Southern senator from North Carolina, who, at the time, was not only a controversial political figure for his unrelenting stance on civil rights but also, though not surprisingly, a staunch and vocal opponent of US foreign aid programs, equating the giving of aid to poorer nations with "throwing money down 'ratholes.'"<sup>1</sup> Bono recalled, "I talked to him about the Biblical origin of the idea of Jubilee Year. . . . He was genuinely moved by the story of the continent of Africa, and he said to me, 'America needs to do more.' I think he felt it as a burden on a spiritual level."<sup>2</sup> Helms explained of Bono, "I was deeply impressed with him. He has depth that I didn't expect. He is led by the Lord to do something about the starving people in Africa."<sup>3</sup> In 2002, Bono's pestering of Republicans paid off in the form of an

1 Joshua Busby, "Bono Made Jesse Helms Cry: Jubilee 2000, Debt Relief, and Moral Action in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007): 248.

2 Susan Dominus, "Questions for Bono; Relief Pitcher," *New York Times Magazine*, October 8, 2000, <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20001008mag-qa-bono.htm>.

3 John Wagner, "In Helms, Bono Finds the Ally He's Looking For," *Raleigh (NC) News and Observer*, September 2, 2000.

additional \$5 billion aid package for the world's poorest countries, with an increased commitment to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria on the horizon. A shades-wearing, peace-sign-waving Bono joined President George W. Bush at the White House to announce the legislation. Calling the deal a "down payment," Bono cautioned that "it's not where we need to be. The administration has now committed itself to an AIDS initiative at some point in the next year. Once my foot is in the door, I'm hard to get out."<sup>4</sup>

Broadly speaking, scholars have accounted for the rise of celebrity diplomats like Bono, as well as other intersections of celebrity and politics, via broad transformations in media culture: specifically, the increasing spectacularization of politics brought about by the rise of television and the increasing commercialization of journalism brought about by deregulation and media conglomeration.<sup>5</sup> In contemporary media contexts, lines between entertainment and politics blur; celebrities like Donald Trump and George Clooney are able to cross over into politics, and political actors like Bill Clinton are subject to celebrity-style evaluations of their personal life and forced to master the art of image making and management.<sup>6</sup> These frameworks, however, tell us little about the specific situation described here: an Irish rock star lobbying, on behalf of international institutions, a right-wing US senator to feel for the plights of populations in the Global South.

Rather than situating the phenomenon as an inevitable outgrowth of commercial media culture's entanglement with politics, this article offers a more nuanced account of celebrity diplomacy by tracing the institutional aims and political rationalities that initially authorized the celebrity diplomat's presence on the world stage.<sup>7</sup> Bono's career as a celebrity diplomat is but one chapter in a longer story that dates back to early cultural diplomacy programs and "one world" visions that took root in the aftermath of World War II. In this context, new and expanding conceptions of internationalism and citizenship made their way into popular culture via sentimental discourses that emphasized emotional, common bonds between Western citizens and distant others. As I show, contemporary articulations of media celebrity and global citizenship owe much of their caring tenor and current form to Danny Kaye, the first official UN goodwill ambassador, whose work as "Mr. UNICEF" cemented the idea that stars might play a productive role in global affairs by mobilizing media audiences to support the United Nations and its promotion of the "general welfare."<sup>8</sup> Specifically, I

4 Madeleine Bunting and Oliver Burkeman, "Pro Bono," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/18/usa.debtrelease>.

5 See Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War, & Election Battles* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New York: New Press, 1999).

6 See Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); John Street, "The Celebrity Politician: Political Style and Popular Culture," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. D. Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006).

7 In a recent issue of *Celebrity Studies*, Mark Wheeler provides a useful history of the UN goodwill ambassador program, engaging with Street's theory of celebrity performance and politics. See Mark Wheeler, "Celebrity Diplomacy: The United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace," *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 6–18.

8 Robert E. Asher et al., *The United Nations and the Promotion of the General Welfare* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1957).

analyze Kaye's starring role in two UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) documentaries—*Assignment Children* (UNICEF, 1955) and *See It Now's* (CBS, 1951–1958) “The Secret Life of Danny Kaye” (CBS, 1956)—and show how stars emerged as icons of international community and global caring.

Adapting a governmentality framework, I bring to light a strikingly different history of celebrity politics, one that reveals stars' and media culture's role in popularizing discourses of world government and practices of global citizenship. Michel Foucault developed the concept of governmentality to account for a highly dispersed form of power specific to liberal-democratic states.<sup>9</sup> Aimed at regulating a population through maximizing the health and wealth of citizens, governmentality works through the social realm, “at a distance” from official centers of power, to shape conducts and dispositions in accordance with broader political rationalities of governing.<sup>10</sup> A governmentality approach thus centers attention on the practical and technical dimensions of cultural forms and phenomena, detailing their effectiveness within liberal governing regimes.<sup>11</sup> Here I adjust Foucault's theory and approach to the international realm to show how stars and celebrities have come to be increasingly embroiled in global governing and international politics. From this global governmentality perspective, “caring stars” like Bono are cultural technologies in an apparatus of global governing that is animated by political rationalities and institutional exigencies specific to the United Nations and the international community.<sup>12</sup> Bono and the deeply felt moral imperatives of which he spoke in his wooing of Jessie Helms are indicative of the technical and practical ways in which Western stars have long been put to work as sentimental educators for international regimes—that is, as promoters of global care and shapers of global citizens.

**Sentimental Education and One World Culture.** The atrocities and devastation of World War II and the growing public concern over life in the atomic age afforded the principles of international cooperation and a shared, common humanity new cultural significance. Eager to capitalize on these growing international sensibilities, in the late 1940s US television networks clamored to broadcast UN events in hopes of tapping into an imagined growing public appetite for global affairs. Annoyed at CBS's 1949 “coup”—that is, its daily broadcasting of General Assembly sessions—NBC's David Sarnoff complained that his own network had “been made to look disinterested in public service and has been made to appear ridiculous in a competitive commercial sense. . . . CBS, who has done practically nothing for the UN in the past, now emerges—by a single gesture—as both enterprising and public spirited!”<sup>13</sup> Early on, television producers were eager to participate in the cultivation of “good” liberal

9 See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

10 See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 1994), 229–245.

11 Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 21.

12 See Wendy Larner and William Walters, “Globalization as Governmentality,” *Alternatives* 29 (2004): 495–514.

13 Andrew Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War: American Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy, 1940–1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 138.

citizens, and promoting the United Nations and internationalism was an important facet of postwar conceptions of public-interest programming.<sup>14</sup> For example, Anna McCarthy describes how a short hidden-camera film titled *Children of the UN* found its way onto the prestigious arts and culture variety show *Omnibus* (CBS 1952–1956; ABC 1956–1957) in 1954. Produced by *Candid Camera*'s (CBS, 1960–1967) Allen Funt, the film observed and interviewed children in a New York international school to honor United Nations Day. *Omnibus* host Alistair Cooke called the film evidence of “a miniature international society . . . without protocol, and without taboos, but with a pride all its own,” and reviewer Ruth Sayers found remarkable the “nice quiet view of one world propaganda.”<sup>15</sup>

As intimidated by these instances, the television industry hoped to play a productive role in the postwar era by educating audiences on matters of international concern and their democratic duties as members of a global society. Michael Curtin argues that the rise of globally oriented documentary programming during this time is indicative not only of market integration and the television's industry's own interests in a globalizing cultural economy but also of the ways in which television, as a potentially global medium, came to participate in promoting the US postwar and Cold War foreign policy agenda both at home and abroad. Documentary programming centered on global affairs was produced in the name of helping US citizens appreciate and embrace their new leadership role in spreading democracy on the international stage while at the same time providing inroads into new cultural markets.<sup>16</sup> Unlike any other mass medium, television—especially satellite technologies—carried the potential for global communion: to create what Lisa Parks calls a fantasy of “global presence,” and thus to engender shared understanding and dialogue between distant populations.<sup>17</sup> As both Curtin and Parks point out, television's approach to global dialogue and communication keenly reflected Western geopolitical interest in development discourse. Parks explains that global televisual events like *Our World* (BBC, 1967)—a live-via-satellite program designed to connect the ideologically divided East and West and the economically divided North and South—“were indistinguishable from Western discourses of modernization, which classified societies as traditional or modern, called for urbanization and literacy in the developing world, and envisioned mass media as agents of social and economic change.”<sup>18</sup> Television's global turn was hence, in many ways, neatly aligned with the United States' global political agenda, which included expanding US markets coupled with a desire to lift the poor, decolonizing world out

14 See Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: New Press, 2010), 1–28.

15 Ruth Sayers, review of *Children of the UN*, CBS, Wesleyan Cinema Archives Omnibus Collection (WCA-OC), series 4, box 18, folder 798, quoted in Anna McCarthy, “‘Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me’: Postwar Social Science and the ‘First Wave’ of Reality TV,” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2nd ed., ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 23–26.

16 Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 60–91.

17 Lisa Parks, “Our World, Satellite Televisuality, and the Fantasy of Global Presence,” in *Planet TV*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 74–93.

18 Parks, “Our World,” 76.

of poverty through development aid, all in the name of countering the spread of communism.

Christina Klein shows how the internationalism that marked postwar media culture was animated by two competing—though not unrelated—visions of world order, as the global cultural imaginary of communist containment commingled with an integrationist sensibility that championed global cooperation, interdependence, and common bonds.<sup>19</sup> Andrew Falk distinguishes what he calls “two world” and “one world” visions. The debate was not over isolationism versus internationalism but rather over what sort of internationalism the United States would embrace moving out of the war: a two-world, Cold War scenario rooted in US superiority, unilateralism, and nationalism, or a one-world, integrationist scenario that was utopian and multilateralist in its orientation.<sup>20</sup> While the global imaginary of containment and two-world visions undoubtedly overdetermined US politics in the 1950s, alternative visions of internationalism, rooted in global integration and the promises of development, also came to permeate the everyday lives of many citizens, especially in the realms of media and culture.

The Cold War was not only about containing the communist threat, then; it was also about articulating a positive vision of world order rooted in what Klein calls a global imaginary of integration:

Where the global imaginary of containment drew on the residual internationalism of the right, with its vision of bulwarks between nations and a mortal conflict between communism and capitalism, the global imaginary of integration drew on the residual internationalism of the left, which imagined the world in terms of open doors that superseded barriers and created pathways between nations. It constructed a world in which differences could be bridged and transcended. In the political rhetoric of integration, relationships of “cooperation” replaced those of conflict, “mutuality” replaced enmity, and “collective security,” “common bonds,” and “community” became the preferred terms for representing the relationship between the United States and the noncommunist world.<sup>21</sup>

This global imaginary of integration—the counterweight to containment—informed domestic, foreign, and cultural policy alike, and as a result, cultural institutions routinely addressed ordinary citizens and media audiences as citizens with moral and social obligations to distant populations.

One of the most important popularizers of global integrationist ideals was Wendell Willkie, whose 1943 internationally best-selling travelogue *One World* galvanized liberal internationalists, including prominent cultural taste-makers and producers.<sup>22</sup> Willkie was a former Democrat who ran for president of the United States as a Republican in

19 Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 19–60.

20 Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War*, 39–62.

21 Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 41.

22 Wendell Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943).

1940 and in 1942 traveled around the world in fifty days aboard the bomber *Gulliver* as part of a wartime mission. Noteworthy for its sympathetic treatment of the Soviet and Chinese peoples, *One World* advocated international cooperation and peace through world government, as well as civil rights and self-determination of peoples both at home and abroad:

When I say that in order to have peace this world must be free, I am only reporting that a great process has started which no man—certainly not Hitler—can stop. Men and women all over the world are on the march, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. After centuries of ignorant and dull compliance, hundreds of millions of people in Eastern Europe and Asia have opened the books. Old fears no longer frighten them. They are no longer willing to be Eastern slaves for Western profits. They are beginning to know that men's welfare throughout the world is interdependent. They are resolved, as we must be, that there is no more place for imperialism within our own society than in the society of nations. The big house on the hill surrounded by mud huts has lost its awesome charm.<sup>23</sup>

As Falk explains, the one-world vision of universalists like Willkie encompassed “several general principles in foreign and domestic contexts: humane capitalism, anti-colonialism, self-determination, civil liberties, and impartiality in dealing with all nations.”<sup>24</sup>

*One World* was widely read and circulated, especially within the cultural industries. In 1943, Twentieth Century Fox's Darryl Zanuck bought the rights to produce a movie version of *One World*, a project that was never completed. Off-screen, members of the Hollywood Democratic Committee (HDC) rallied anew around Willkie's principles. Looking for direction after committing the previous years to the war effort, the HDC turned to international issues, lobbying the US government and mobilizing public opinion to support ratification of the United Nations and passage of the Bretton Woods trade agreement. For example, the organization sponsored a series of public-service radio broadcasts featuring Bette Davis, Walter Huston, Humphrey Bogart, and Olivia de Havilland that were designed to educate listeners about the new roles of the United States and US citizens in the postwar world. *One World* also provided inspiration for many of the writers of television's early anthology dramas.<sup>25</sup>

Willkie's ideas also had a regular home at the *Saturday Review*, thanks to the leadership of Norman Cousins, who became editor of the weekly magazine in 1942 and immediately began to increase the magazine's nonliterary content, broadening the publication's purview to include international affairs like war, famine, travel, and aid. Over his tenure, Cousins greatly expanded the weekly's readership, which consisted primarily of highly educated, middle- and upper-class readers. Like Willkie, Cousins was a firm believer in world government and the principles of universalism associated with liberal internationalism. As Klein describes, Cousins saw actively embracing one's membership in a global human community as a requisite of citizenship in the

23 Ibid., 203–204.

24 Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War*, 47.

25 Ibid., 134–142.

postwar world. He thus regularly urged his readers to overcome the “miseducation” that they had received about cultural differences and instead to focus on the shared humanity that links all nations.<sup>26</sup> Under Cousins’s leadership, the *Saturday Review* not only sought to shape the dispositions and attitudes of its readers by orienting them to the issues of the international community; the magazine also targeted readers’ conducts by providing them with opportunities to materialize their global commitments. *Saturday Review* editors and readers worked together on international humanitarian projects; for example, the Hiroshima Maidens and Ravensbrueck Lapins projects brought women victims of the bombing of Japan and Polish victims of Nazi medical experimentation, respectively, to the United States for plastic surgery.<sup>27</sup>

More often than not, the utopian, universalist spirit of Willkie’s *One World* and the integrationist imaginary it refracted were culturally articulated in a sentimental mode. Militating against commonplace interpretations of sentimentalism as shallow or false emotionalism, Klein traces the contours of sentimental discourse to show how it was poised to emerge as the predominant one of integrationist, anti-conquest, one-world visions:

First, sentimental narratives tend to focus not on the lone individual but on the “self-in-relation”; they uphold human connection as the highest idea and emphasize the forging of bonds and the creation of solidarities among friends, family, and community. Second, a sentimental text explores how these bonds are forged across a divide of difference. . . . [T]he sentimental is thus a universalizing mode that imagines the possibility of transcending particularity by recognizing a common and shared humanity. Third, these sentimental human connections are characterized by reciprocity and exchange. . . . [T]he paired acts of giving and receiving serve as the mechanisms through which differences are bridged. Fourth, emotions serve as the means for achieving and maintaining this exchange; the sentimental mode values the intensity of the individual’s felt experience, and holds up sympathy—the ability to feel what another person is feeling, especially his suffering—as the most prized.<sup>28</sup>

*Sentimental education* is thus the term that Klein gives to an array of cultural practices that sought to bring citizens into alignment with the global imaginary of integration through constructing emotional bonds between US citizens and their counterparts in the East and Global South. Cultural differences among populations were to be bridged affectively through individualized connections and transformative “acts of giving and receiving.” Sentimental education was thus about “teaching Americans to understand themselves not just as citizens of an autonomous nation but as participants in a world system that inextricably embedded them within a network of multinational ties.”<sup>29</sup> It included the pedagogic efforts of the *Saturday Review*, as well as official cultural programs like People to People, a 1956 US Information Agency effort designed

26 Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 80.

27 Ibid., 83.

28 Ibid., 14.

29 Ibid., 46.



to generate public support for foreign aid programs and for internationalism more broadly. On the one hand, People to People was directed outward to an international audience and “sought to counter Soviet propaganda by promoting face-to-face contact between Americans and people in other countries and thereby display what America was ‘really’ like.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the program was directed inward, toward the hearts and conducts of US citizens, thus serving as a domestic education program. Comprising forty-two committees that arranged opportunities for Americans to develop bonds with others from around the world, the program encouraged sympathy and identification that transcended cultural differences, seeking to create emotional ties that could “leap” governments. Designed to give the global imaginary of integration a material, institutional, and cultural foundation in the United States, People to People “sought to enlist the public in Washington’s world-ordering project of ‘free world’ integration by turning it into a project in which ordinary Americans could feel a personal stake.”<sup>31</sup> So, while one-world visions would be quickly overshadowed by the two-world visions of the Cold Warriors and the global imaginary of containment, the principle of a shared, common humanity and the notion that US citizens had social and moral obligations as members of this global community lived on in varying intensities, particularly in the heightened cultural diplomacy efforts that marked the postwar and Cold War eras.

**Celebrity Diplomacy and US “Soft Power.”** Born of new thinking in Washington about the geopolitical expediency of culture, People to People was part of a growing apparatus of cultural diplomacy. Generally speaking, cultural diplomacy involves the exchange of ideas, cultures, and traditions in the name of heightened understanding between nations. Organized US cultural diplomacy dates back to 1919 and Andrew Carnegie’s establishment of the Endowment for International Peace, which emphasized “sponsoring exchanges of professors, students, and publications, stimulating translations and the book trade, and encouraging the teaching of English.”<sup>32</sup> Increasingly, the cultural diplomacy initiatives of the postwar era afforded ordinary citizens important roles to play in international affairs. As Falk explains:

The period from the 1940s onward would see unprecedented public involvement in foreign relations on a daily basis. Whereas diplomacy once engaged a small number of elites operating in secret, wrote Emil Lengyel, by 1945 “the people were to become the craftsmen of the new diplomacy. . . . The dark niches of foreign offices had been flooded with the light of public curiosity. The masses would have to become acquainted with the problems of other countries—now their own problems.” A new democratic age of diplomacy was born.<sup>33</sup>

30 Ibid., 50.

31 Ibid.

32 Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 18.

33 Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War*, 50.