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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The origins of this book began in the classroom. I long have had a passion for music, popular culture, and politics, and I encouraged my students to make connections among them. We had amazing discussions about organizing, citizen engagement, and the media, which led to historical and contemporary questions about musicians and celebrities. Had George Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh actually raised consciousness about starvation and oppression in Southeast Asia? Had John Lennon's organizing with Jerry Rubin and Abby Hoffman amounted to any real changes? Does it make a difference when politicians play music at their rallies? How did Ronald Reagan co-opt Bruce Springsteen's critical and subversive "Born in the USA" as a campaign theme? Why was President George Bush publicly consulting with Bono from U2 about issues in the developing world? As my students became more emotionally and academically engaged with the subject matter, I began to explore what it was about musicians and celebrities that entangled them with politics. Like so many colleagues, I was interested but skeptical about the power and influence generated by famous people in popular culture. However, my skepticism got the best of me, and I began to think of ways that I could test a thesis: that celebrity activists could effectively influence the political process.

At the time I began the process of writing this book, there was practically no literature in political science on the topic of celebrities in politics. West and Orman's *Celebrity Politics* (2003) was in print, John Street (1997, 2002) had done some seminal research on the subject, and there were a handful of articles. However, convincing peers and publishers that this topic was worth pursuing was the most challenging part of this project. When I argue in this book that there has been strong skepticism in the political science community about the notion that celebrities make any difference in politics, I am not referring to the literature. I am literally talking about political scientists telling me that I was wasting my time—that no one takes celebrities seriously, and at best they are generally good for photo ops with politicians. In the words of George Harrison's "Awaiting on You All," I was "awaiting" the academic community to "awaken and see" the potential in this research area. Of course, the very fact that this attitude was so entrenched in the community made this study a sort of crucial case. If everyone expected that celebrities didn't matter much in politics, it would indeed be significant if I proved otherwise.

Eventually, others published works on this subject, and I found a friendly pub-

lisher at the University Press of Kansas, willing to support me on this project. As we pushed this project toward completion in 2016, something odd happened: Donald Trump became the presumptive Republican nominee for president of the United States. Here we had the unlikely case of a celebrity with no prior experience in public office running for the most powerful political position in the world. Granted, the purpose of this book was not to focus on the effectiveness of celebrities running for office. The focus of this book is on the influence of celebrity activists on the political process. However, Trump was a celebrity activist of sorts—convincing millions only a few years earlier that Barack Obama was not born in the United States and turning “birtherism” into a public issue that the president could not ignore. How could we publish this book without reference to Trump?

With an eye on the 2016 election, I did additional research. I studied Trump, and gathered additional data on people’s perceptions of him as a spokesperson, activist, celebrity, and politician. While this book is not exclusively about Donald Trump, I believe that the conclusions that I have derived from the data do offer some insights on Trump’s successful bid for the presidency. Now the notion that a celebrity might influence the political system somehow seems less far-fetched.

Any project like this cannot be achieved without a community of support, and despite the challenges of completing this work, many supported me. The few words or the mention of a name below do not adequately express my deep appreciation for those who brought me to this point.

First, I would like to thank those at the University Press of Kansas for having confidence in this project, including Chuck Myers, Joyce Harrison, Larisa Martin, Michael Kehoe, the editorial board, and good people such as Elaine Durham Otto who did the hard work to turn this manuscript into a book.

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and offered feedback include Don Haider-Markel, John Kennedy, Jim Daugherty, Burdett Loomis, Kate Weaver, and Paul D'Anieri.

I would also like to recognize those who inspired me to rethink my skepticism about the role of celebrities and musicians in politics. Long before this became a research project, an idea to write a book about music and politics was hatched with Jill Steans in a bar in Brussels. Debates in pubs in Birmingham and Munich with Oliver Hofmann about Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Bono greatly softened my attitude and opened my mind to the possibility that they might be more conscientious and influential than I first expected.

Many outstanding individuals not only provided key opportunities but also specifically helped to facilitate the execution of the survey. By execution, I mean that people assisted in the editing of the survey, arranged for participants on my behalf, made copies and collated different versions of surveys, assisted me with revisions, guided me through processes of institutional review, and so much more. As a personal favor to me, these people undertook many menial tasks and took their valuable time to ensure that the study would be successful. These people include Larissa Brown, Carolyn Doolittle, Karenbeth Zacharias, Jim Cox, Nicole Hess-Escalante, Jessica Vega-Anaya, Phil Watlington, Jim Zimmerman, David Strohm, David Greene, Nancy King, Jillian Wasson, Patricia Howard, Don Kellogg, Emily Ford, Andy Jett, Dan Falvey, Erin Nielsen, Molly Smith, Boniface Mutuku, Shawn Kane, Dan Williams, and many others. For these selfless acts, I will always be grateful. Thank you for your encouragement and your help.

Thanks also to my fellow teachers, professionals, academics, and friends for the encouragement to be a better teacher and a better researcher as well as for inspiring me to push this project to completion, including Courtney Kasun, Geoff Peterson, Catharine Parnell, John Condra, Judy Favor, Brett Cooper, Janet Graham, Jim Leiker, and Brian Wright. Among those great teachers, developers, and "opportunity givers," I must single out Anne Daugherty. In addition to giving me creative license to create and teach classes that merge music, culture, and politics such as "Political History of Rock and Roll," "Revolution: The Beatles and the 1960s," and "Songs of Unrest," she has been a mentor and advisor, gently providing guidance that has improved my teaching. I also appreciate the help and advice of Ron Logan and Rick Gunter, my closest teammates and mentors at the University of Saint Mary, who have constantly supported my professional development, teaching, and research.

I would also like to thank more students than I can possibly mention here. You have all been inspirational. I cannot possibly, in this space, share the ways in which you have made my life richer. You are in my mind and heart. At times I have been the student and other times the instructor, but I always seem to learn more than I teach.

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Since this book takes a serious nod to music and the arts, I must also acknowledge my eternal bandmates: Jonathan Leahey, Jeremy Baguyos, Jeff Matchette, Matt Lenahan, Aaron Green, Mark Hall, Jason McDonnell, Mike Harvey, Andrea O'Keefe, and John Caniglia. I especially remember Phillip Moore, who passed away while I was completing this book.

This journey would not have been possible without my family, who instilled in me the confidence necessary to complete a task such as this, particularly my parents, Dan and Dianna Sutton; my siblings, Mike, Carrie, Amy, and Andrea; my daughters, Madeline and Danielle; and my very loving and patient wife, Kimberly.

Finally, I thank God . . . from whom all blessings flow.



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1. The President Meets the Rock Star

“George Bush is a comedian. . . . I walk down the corridor, he comes out and stands to attention. ‘Here’s the President. . . . What do you want us to do this time, Bono?’”

This is Bono, lead singer of the rock group U2, talking about a private exchange with President George W. Bush at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. According to Bono, the president humorously stood at attention, as if he were at the beck and call of the rock star.

At the G8 summit, Bono had a free access “backstage pass,” which allowed him to lobby President Bush and other world leaders to sign a communiqué pledging \$50 billion of debt relief to some of the poorest countries in the world. “Now this is a guy who knows where I stand on the [Iraq] war,” Bono continues, “a long, long way from where he stands—who knows there are so many things we could never see eye to eye on, and yet the leader of the free world lets us into the room and we’re there for an hour, shaking the tree at the last minute, pushing malaria and pushing girls’ education, making sure it ends up in the communiqué” (McCormick et al. 2006, 342).

What is a rock star doing at a gathering of the world’s most powerful political leaders, and why should anyone listen to him? Bono is not an elected official. The indebted countries he claims to represent are not paying him and did not choose him to be their spokesman. Bono and his organization did not donate cash to Bush’s reelection campaign. Bono’s main U.S. constituency, so to speak, consists of consumers of U2 records and concerts. Yet Bono gained rare access to some of the most powerful leaders in the world and persuaded them to sign a landmark document pledging a substantial sum. Bono’s story presents a modern puzzle: Why would the president of the United States give a rock star an hour of his time to lobby him directly on international debt relief? What does a celebrity have to offer a president?

Prior to 2016, this was a genuinely surprising question. Then, in a twist that seemed to emerge from the fictional political satire of films like Tim Robbins’s *Bob Roberts* or Warren Beatty’s *Bullworth*, a celebrity became president.¹ Trump won. Donald J. Trump, a high-profile real estate developer and reality show star, was elected to the most powerful political position in the world. Trump did not win the Republican nomination or the presidency based on his resumé. He had

no prior experience in military or public office. Indeed, more than any governor that ever ran an anti-Washington, anti-establishment campaign, Trump ran as the ultimate outsider. The fact that he was a celebrity instead of a politician became an asset rather than a liability. His only relevant experience was as a businessman, which he had promoted for years through tabloids and television. He brandished this experience as a qualification to improve the operations of government.

These facts make Trump rare but not unique. Outsiders with no political experience occasionally come onto the American scene to capitalize on voters' disgust with the establishment. This populist approach has a certain mass appeal. Ross Perot, running in 1992 and less successfully in 1996, took a similar approach, promising to run the government like a business. What makes Trump unusual, according to Bill Schneider of Reuters (2015), is that he "combines two political traditions: the political outsider and the fringe candidate." In addition to populist pronouncements, Trump also appeals to an extreme ideological core of Republicans centered in the Tea Party, who are very committed and motivated.

These factors alone do not necessarily prove his success, however. Many have argued that his bold campaign style may have made an important difference. Trump's campaign events were like rock concerts. He was short on policy details and high on drama. People were as attracted to his insults as they were to his proposals. Indeed, he could utter the most offensive and outlandish statements, making outrageous promises and claims, and his popularity with his base would eventually rebound. Pundits expected disparaging statements about immigrants and a Mexican judge, a public altercation with the Muslim parents of an American soldier, disparaging comments about women and minorities, and revelations of a conversation in which he bragged about hypothetical sexual assault to derail his campaign. However, as Trump himself said at a rally in Iowa, "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters" (Diamond 2016). What people expected from a campaign and a successful presidential candidate was ultimately turned on its head.

While it is correct that Trump has never held public office before, he has still been involved in politics, and his presidential run was years in the making. In 1987, at the encouragement of longtime Republican operative Roger Stone, Trump openly criticized Ronald Reagan's foreign policy and hinted that he might run for president, ultimately landing in New Hampshire with an announcement that he would not do so (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 276). By the mid-1990s, his financial problems prevented his involvement in many political activities other than his routine support of political candidates as an ongoing cost of doing business. In 1999 he suggested that he might run for president for the Reform Party, naming Oprah Winfrey as a possible vice presidential choice. In 2000 he sought advice

from Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura, but decided that he would not run and could not win as a third party candidate. Nevertheless, he won Reform Party primaries in Michigan and California (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 285–87).

Trump changed party identification seven times between 1999 and 2011 before contemplating a presidential run again. Trump's resurgent celebrity, built upon his success as the star of the reality television show *The Apprentice*, made him a front-runner, tied for second behind former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and polling first among self-identified Tea Party voters. It was then that Trump began a grassroots campaign challenging President Barack Obama's citizenship, alleging that he was born in Kenya rather than in the United States. While the political or media establishment never took these allegations too seriously, it was an interesting enough sideshow to make news. Trump would regularly tweet and show up on news shows to cast doubt on Obama's citizenship and to demand "transparency." Eventually Obama produced his long form birth certificate, announced that he had no time for this "silliness," and then famously roasted Trump at the 2011 White House Correspondents' Dinner. Two weeks later, Trump announced that he would not run for president and eventually endorsed Mitt Romney for president. Twelve days after Romney's defeat, he patented the slogan "Make America Great Again" (Barbaro 2016; Kranish and Fisher 2016, 291–92; Parker and Eder 2016).

Despite Trump's long-term ambition to be president, in some ways he has more in common with Bono than he does with Bush or Obama. Like Bono, he is a celebrity with no experience as a public official. Like Bono, he educated himself in political organizing through networking with political elites. Like Bono, he was really a political activist rather than a politician.

Indeed, outside of his successful presidential run—which one could argue more closely resembled a public advocacy campaign than a political campaign—his most successful political exercise was championing the birther movement. One could argue that it ended ignominiously, with Trump dropping his presidential aspirations after facing the ridicule of the White House Correspondents' Dinner. However, he was extremely effective as a celebrity activist. He forced Obama to release his birth certificate. He likely had an effect on public opinion. In February 2011, one month before Trump weighed in on the birther issue, a CNN poll revealed that only 25 percent of Americans had doubts about Obama's citizenship, and a PPP poll revealed that 51 percent of Republicans believed that Obama was not born in the United States. In March Trump first expressed his birther conspiracy beliefs on the daytime television show *The View*. Just before Obama released his birth certificate in April, a Gallup poll revealed that only 38 percent of all Americans were convinced that Obama was "definitely" born in the

United States. After his birth certificate was released, that number improved to 47 percent. However, even as late as August 2016, an NBC poll revealed that 72 percent of Republicans believed that Obama was not born in the United States, and these results were consistent among both “high and low political knowledge Republicans” (Barbaro 2016; A. Barr 2011; Cheney 2016; Clinton and Roush 2016; Condon 2011; Parker and Eder 2016).

How much of Trump’s electoral success had to do with his celebrity status? During interviews conducted for research on this book, respondents were asked, “Is there something about Trump’s celebrity status that gave him an edge in the campaign? If so, what was it?” The following answers seem to reinforce much of the prior analysis:

“People had enough of the typical politician. Trump is different and talks like the average Joe.”

“He appealed to the individuals tired of politicians. His lack of filter seemed to make people feel he was real and more trustworthy than a politician. In addition, his appearance as a successful businessman elevated his status.”

“I believe uneducated Americans saw a familiar face they’d seen on television and decided to vote for him like it was *American Idol*.”

Perhaps too much should not be made of Trump’s success. After all, a majority of Americans voted for former secretary of state Hillary Clinton and her more conventional political campaign. According to some analyses, the number of votes in key districts that made a difference in Trump’s Electoral College victory could fill a small stadium (Meko, Lu, and Gamio 2016). Still, the very fact that a celebrity could mount a campaign to topple one of America’s most experienced political insiders is striking. Is there something that can be learned from stories like Trump’s? Are there dozens of potential “Donald Trumps”? Are there celebrities with enough fame, power, and skills to influence the political system? If so, how does this influence work?

SPEAKING OUT: LISTEN TO BATMAN

For every action, there must be a reaction. The ascendancy of celebrity Trump to the Republican nomination and ultimately the presidency has provoked an intense politicized reaction from his fellow celebrities. To name a few, producer Lee Daniels and many in the cast of his television show, *Empire*, criticized Trump for “violence and nasty rhetoric against mankind.” *West Wing* actor Richard Schiff charged, “We’ve never experienced anyone so blatantly willing to care so little

about what happens to the world.” Actor Lena Dunham, speaking at the Democratic National Convention, said that Trump’s “rhetoric about women takes us back to a time when we were meant to be beautiful and silent.” America Ferrera, in another DNC speech, argued that “Donald’s not making America great again. He’s making America hate again.” Actor Susan Sarandon attacked Trump for making “hatred and racism normal” in America. Accepting her Golden Globe award in January 2017, actor Meryl Streep criticized Trump for mocking a disabled reporter in 2016: “This instinct to humiliate, when it’s modeled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody’s life, because it kind of gives permission for other people to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect. Violence incites violence” (N. Brown 2017).

The Women’s March on Washington on January 21—the largest protest in American history—featured high-profile celebrities such as Janelle Monáe, Scarlett Johansson, Michael Moore, and Madonna speaking and performing on behalf of a multitude of liberal causes. Other celebrities took to the street and led chants, such as Katy Perry, Julia Roberts, Amy Poehler, Emma Watson, and Felicity Huffman. Countless other celebrities appeared at marches throughout the world that day, including Ian McKellen, Gillian Anderson, and Lin-Manuel Miranda in London (Garfield 2017; Izadi 2017). This celebrity activism was followed by political statements at the Golden Globes, Grammys, Film Independent Spirit Awards, and Oscar ceremonies from stars such as Jimmy Fallon, Hugh Laurie, Viola Davis, James Corden, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, Patton Oswalt, Casey Affleck, Jodi Foster, and Molly Shannon (E. Berman 2017; Del Barco 2017; Greenburg 2017; Konerman 2017). Singer and actor Jennifer Lopez summed up the general mood at the Grammy Awards: “At this particular time in history, our voices are needed more than ever” (Greenburg 2017).

“God help us,” sighed actor Robert De Niro (N. Brown 2017).

Even action star, former celebrity turned politician, and fellow Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger came out against Trump. Schwarzenegger succeeded Trump as the host of *The Apprentice*. In tweets and during a live presidential press conference, President Trump criticized Schwarzenegger for low ratings, calling the show a “total disaster.” Schwarzenegger’s first instinct was to “request a meeting and go back to New York. And then . . . just smash his face into the table.” Upon further reflection, he thought it better to “be above all of that and put him on the spot,” challenging Trump to “work for all of the American people as aggressively as you worked for your ratings” (Arnold Schwarzenegger on Trump 2017).

It is easy to argue that when celebrities speak, people listen. However, whether people pay much attention or care about political statements such as these is quite another question. A survey by CNN/USA Today said that only 3 percent of Americans believed that celebrities can be effective in influencing the political process

or causes. Most (64 percent) believed that they were “not too effective or effective at all,” and 87 percent rejected the idea that celebrities influenced their personal positions on political issues (Gunter 2014, 145).

U.S. Olympic runner Nick Symmonds shares these sentiments. He argues that he and other athletes lack the credentials or ability to influence people, but that they have freedom of speech, just like any other citizen. In an interview expressing support for gun control and opposition to discrimination against homosexuals, he expresses his belief that he is obliged to speak his mind, even if it comes to nothing and even if his point of view provokes controversy:

Too often, athletes go into a press conference and are asked difficult questions and they say, “No comment,” and I never wanted to be that kind of athlete. I have opinions on everything and I have logical reasons why I have come to those conclusions and I’ll tell you why I feel that way. . . . They said, you know, you’re an athlete. What makes you qualified to speak out about anything? Or some people have gone as far as to say I’m a disgrace to America and I shouldn’t be allowed to represent the country because I can’t keep my mouth shut. And I just laugh at these people. . . . First Amendment is the right to free speech. And as an American, I’m going to exercise that right domestically and internationally, barring getting arrested in Russia for speaking out against their laws, where my First Amendment doesn’t necessarily apply (Ashlock 2013).

The public’s awkward, if not cynical, relationship with outspoken celebrities is nothing new. Singer Frank Sinatra supported Roosevelt for president in 1944, stating, “Some people tell me I may hurt my career by taking sides in a political campaign. And I say to them, ‘To hell with this career. Government is more important’” (Suebsaeng 2015).

Despite Symmonds’s self-professed humility about his personal views, few would care about his opinion if he were not an Olympic athlete. Likewise, Symmonds did not write an op-ed in *Runner’s World* or publicly dedicate “his silver medal to his gay and lesbian friends,” enduring criticism from cynics, if he did not hope or expect to change some minds (Symmonds 2013).

In contrast, actor Ben Affleck acknowledges society’s cynicism about celebrities and their causes, but he also claims to be far different from the typical American citizen. His aspirations are explicit. Appearing in a joint interview with Senator Russ Feingold on NPR’s *Morning Edition* with David Greene, Affleck claims:

I’m not an expert. I’m a person who’s spent a lot of energy and dedicated a lot of my time to this issue. . . . What I am is an advocate, and a human

being, and a director, and an actor, and somebody who cares deeply about this, and wants other people to know about it. . . . We live in a society that gives a very, very high profile to even the most mundane activities of entertainers, and so I'd like to take some of that interest and focus it on something substantial (Greene 2014).

Affleck is right. Celebrities are not just typical American citizens. Few media consumers are interested in the real “mundane activities” of regular people.² They want to hear from the next Batman. This may not be logical or rational. Indeed, it makes little sense to consult the next Batman on matters of public policy. Yet people do. And Affleck believes that he has something intelligent to share. Thus when Ben Affleck takes the microphone in an NPR studio, he believes that people will want to listen to Batman's account of the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By appearing on a radio program, he hopes that Batman will be more likely than most experts to raise awareness and move people toward action on this issue.

Feingold and Greene seemed tacitly to concur. In the interview, 68 of the spoken words were Feingold's, while 963 were Affleck's. The interview was almost entirely directed toward Affleck, and Feingold did not attempt to intervene in the conversation. From this single example, one could infer that reporters and politicians alike may believe that people just wanted to listen to Batman—or that a celebrity is better at getting attention and making a case than a politician is.

I'M JUST A SINGER IN A ROCK AND ROLL BAND: GOOD INTENTIONS VERSUS REALITY

As mentioned before, there may be more in common between Trump and Bono than between Trump and Bush or Obama. However, Trump's foray into celebrity activism was different from most of the celebrity activists profiled in this book. One could argue that Trump's run for public office may have been an opportunity to serve his country and to “make America great again.” However, Trump sought political power. To the extent that he was able to exert celebrity influence, it was on behalf of his own electoral aspirations, not for a particular cause. Unlike Trump, the other celebrities profiled in this book have advocated on behalf of groups and political issues without seeking political office. Thus the motives are different. Trump wanted to gain political power to advance an agenda. The others intend to influence those in political power in order to advance an agenda.

This distinction is crucial. Trump did not have to “land lunches” with politicians to run for office. He could have done so. If, in 2015, he had convinced the

establishment that he was a viable candidate and sought party support, some in the party would certainly have taken him seriously, and his presidential bid might have started more smoothly. Republicans have an interest in running a winning candidate. However, Trump did not want or need the attention of politicians. Part of the appeal of his campaign was to run against Washington in general and against the Republican Party establishment in particular. With his wealth and independence, he claimed to raise his own money and build his own organization, free from influence of the establishment. In Trump's own words, "It would be nice if the Republicans stuck together. I can win one way or the other. I obviously won the primaries without them. I'm an outsider and I won the primaries" (Bronston 2016).

Bono, on the other hand, is "just a singer in a rock and roll band." He has no aspirations for higher office. During early concert performances with U2, he was prone to polemic political statements that were sometimes directed at politicians. Since Trump's candidacy, he returned to this style of criticism in concert, attacking Trump for his policies on immigration and accusing him of "running off with the American dream" (Bruculieri 2016). However, most of Bono's political advocacy has involved working with transnational advocacy groups in which he has played the role of spokesman and lobbyist. In that role, he has little interest in burning bridges with politicians. Good intentions alone will not garner the attention of public officials. Thus, his game is quite different. He wants to land lunches with American presidents and politicians, even if they are diametrically opposed to him on most policies. Celebrities like Bono need to convince politicians that it is worth their time to ally with a celebrity. One could easily envision him attempting to reconcile with Trump in order to gain common ground on international issues, just as he did with George W. Bush, which reportedly began as a contentious relationship and ended as a friendship.

In this spirit, it is worth remembering that not every celebrity came out against Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign or early in his presidency. An adversarial approach—characterized by those who made political statements at awards shows—may not always be the most effective way to influence the political process. At the very least, it is only one part of an overall influence strategy. Some celebrities, like Bono during the Bush administration, utilize more of an insider strategy. Actor Leonardo DiCaprio, an ardent environmental activist, met with Trump to discuss climate change shortly after his announcement that climate science skeptic Scott Pruitt would be appointed to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Former NFL players Jim Brown and Ray Lewis lobbied Trump to support "Amer-I-Can," their organization with the mission of teaching life skills to the poor. Rapper Kanye West spoke with Trump "to discuss multicultural issues" including bullying, edu-

cation, and violence (Flores 2017; Holland 2016; Liu 2016). Despite Trump's strong independent streak, he is still scheduling meetings with celebrities. Why?

In Trump's case, part of the motivation may be to slight his adversaries. Trump's celebrity meetings took place in a context where Jesse Jackson and other civil rights leaders were attempting to meet with the president to discuss urban policies and violence. As of his press conference on February 16, 2017, Trump still had not met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus. It is possible that Trump could be pursuing an outside strategy, just as he did during the campaign: communicating a sensitivity toward issues that concern minorities on his own terms, while making it clear that he does not need or perhaps want the attention of those who have been critical of him, such as civil rights icon and Georgia representative John Lewis (Alcindor 2017; Flores 2017). Instead of relying on civil rights leaders of the establishment, perhaps Trump hopes to legitimate his own leaders.

However, Trump is exceptional. He won the election by inventing his own playbook, so to speak. He has had more experience as a celebrity than as a politician. So an answer to the question "Why would Trump consult with a celebrity?" is likely quite different from the more general question, "Why would any other politician consult with a celebrity?" In answering the more general question, three factors may be at play.

One factor is the need for politicians to attract attention. Trump does not need this, but most politicians do. Most Americans probably never heard of Utah representative Jason Chaffetz until social media made him a temporary social pariah, drawing the ire of thousands of attendees at a town hall meeting for refusing to investigate Trump's conflicts of interest. Even with his high-profile position as House Oversight Committee chairman, and his missteps in handling the investigation into Russian interference in the U.S. election, Chaffetz is still relatively unknown to most Americans. If he wished to draw attention to himself or to champion a cause, he could consult with a celebrity. Likewise, Russ Feingold is a Senate veteran but hardly a household name. His alliance with Affleck was, in part, to focus public attention on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While there is a logic to a politician working with a celebrity to raise the profile of an issue, evidence to support this notion has been sparse. Some scholars have argued that celebrities can be helpful to advocacy groups, but may not be powerful enough to gain significant attention or influence the public agenda. Celebrity involvement may attract headlines, but it represents "just one small piece of the media's attention to these larger political issues or causes" (Becker 2010, 96). Celebrities may be more likely to conveniently and cynically "jump on the bandwagon" after a politician has already focused media attention on an issue or if the issue is already generally salient across media sources (Hawkins 2011). Indeed,

Trump did not invent birtherism. He joined the cause. In addition, celebrities may be more effective at attracting the attention of niche audiences rather than broad segments of the population (Marwick 2013; Senft 2008; Thrall et al. 2008). Given the mixed and pessimistic outcomes of this literature, further research is needed. Can celebrities attract attention to causes, and what kind of attention can they garner? Are they more effective at attracting headlines in newspapers or in the more photo-friendly world of broadcast journalism? If they are effective at commanding media attention, what factors contribute to these abilities?

A second factor that attracts politicians to celebrities is the potential credibility they may bring to an issue. This factor is far from obvious, because celebrities are presumed to have very little credibility outside of entertainment. One would assume that scientists, scholars, and business leaders make much more credible advocates. In short, it is not difficult to understand why celebrities would want to speak their conscience and how they might gain some attention for an issue. It is much more difficult to understand why anyone in the public would care. As a result, it is not surprising that political science researchers have focused little attention on the perceived credibility of celebrities. If the person who plays the next Batman is simply “eye candy” to garner attention for a cause, credibility really does not matter.

The marketing and advertising literature has demonstrated that celebrity credibility may affect the power of a product endorsement. The more popular and credible the celebrities, the more likely individuals will agree with them, particularly if they are attractive (W. J. Brown, Basil, and Bocarnea 2003; D. J. Jackson 2008; Khong Kok Wei, and You Li Wu 2013). Businesses make regular decisions about whether a celebrity endorsement will improve or damage brand image (Atkin and Block 1983; Elberse and Verleun 2012; Freiden 1984; Kamins 1970; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983; Roy 2012). However, do celebrities carry much political credibility, and are all celebrity endorsements equally positive? The massive amount of celebrity support Hillary Clinton enjoyed was not enough for her to win the Electoral College (Robehmed 2016). On the other hand, she was running against celebrity Trump. Similarly, Leah Wright Rigueur, a professor of public policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, argues that Trump’s meeting with Kanye West would not give Trump credibility with black voters (Holland 2016). Would different celebrities enhance Trump’s credibility? If celebrities are credible, what is the source of that credibility?

A third factor that may influence public officials to ally with celebrities is their ability to persuade. We know, within certain circumstances, that celebrities can sell toothpaste and cars (Atkin and Block 1983; Boorstin 1992, 162; Gamson 2007; Miciah and Shanklin 1994). Do they have the same ability to succeed in the more serious business of selling issues, causes, and candidates? Research has been limited

on this question. The most common studies focus on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements of candidates (Boon and Lomore 2001; Brubaker 2011; Garthwaite and Moore 2008; Gunter 2014, 142; D. J. Jackson and Darrow 2005; Lammie 2007; MediaVest USA 2004; Meyer and Gamson 1995; Nownes 2012; O'Regan 2014; Pease and Brewer 2008; L. Powell and Cowart 2012; Schuessler 2000; Wood and Herbst 2007). However, very little has been written on the effectiveness of celebrities in issue advocacy. The extant literature offers some cautious and limited optimism for the possibilities for celebrity persuasion. Becker (2010, 96) argues that "issue advocacy efforts can strengthen public agreement with accepted political arguments and in some cases can also make unpopular political statements seem more acceptable—especially among members of an attentive or captive audience" (D. J. Jackson and Darrow 2005).

However, additional research is needed to support or challenge the notion that celebrities are persuasive in their advocacy of political issues. Not all celebrities are equally good at selling consumer products (Tuttle 2012), so it is likely that they are also not equally good at selling political issues and causes. If celebrities are persuasive, what factors contribute to this ability? Might there be a mismatch of celebrity and issue? Might a conservative politician be seen as less persuasive when standing next to a liberal celebrity? Could a celebrity more effectively persuade someone to support a school funding bill where there is a lot of consensus already than to support a wedge issue like gun control? Moreover, could celebrities' polemic political statements hurt their credibility with certain audiences? At the end of the day, perhaps Bono, Symmonds, and Affleck—for all of their money, fame, and gifts in entertainment—really are incapable of commanding much attention outside of tabloids. Maybe they have less credibility than politicians. And perhaps their powers of persuasion are little better than those of any politician or citizen.

If celebrities are found to be politically influential, the normative question remains: Is this a good thing? This question has received far more attention in the academic literature than the aforementioned empirical questions.³ Ben Affleck's involvement in politics may be good for raising awareness about the Congo, and it may be good for his image. However, is his activism good for democracy? Many have argued that celebrity advocacy illustrates a democratization of politics, where citizens other than politicians may gain media attention and advance issues on behalf of worthy causes that would not otherwise receive public attention. As citizens have felt more jaded about elected officials, they have felt less jaded about celebrity activists (West and Orman 2003, x). Moreover, the identification and idolization of celebrities may inspire some citizens who otherwise would not be involved in politics to pay attention and perhaps even to get involved, which offers a potential benefit to participatory democracy.

Others have argued that the possible perception of celebrities as opportunistic

may numb citizens to the seriousness of the issues.⁴ In addition, those who follow celebrity news are often the least likely to be involved—or even interested—in politics. Thus rising coverage of a few celebrities' pet issues may raise awareness, but may not lead to any increased likelihood to act or vote. Perhaps celebrity activism leads citizens to become even more apathetic or to withdraw from political processes (Couldry and Markham 2007; Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos, and Huliaras 2011). Perhaps a loose social media awareness of an issue, an identification with a celebrity activist, and a compulsion to share articles or comment on social media convinces the average citizen consumer that s/he has already performed a civic duty.

Finally, if we accept the purported benefit of celebrity politics—that the system is somehow more democratized and accessible to nonpoliticians—we must also accept the potential downside of that promise. Do we want inexperienced citizens or celebrities with disproportionate access to mass media to influence the political system or to attain higher office? Donald Trump is the perfect manifestation of everything that is promising and perilous about celebrity politics. On the one hand, he is a real outsider who has the potential to radically change the operations of the presidency and introduce policies and reforms that may have been beyond the scope of conventional politicians. On the other hand, his inexperience, lack of expertise, and potential conflicts of interest led to many tactical and policy missteps early in his administration. To the right, he is a hero who is ready to drain the swamp, attack the media, and potentially bring radical action out of gridlock. To the left, he is a demagogue whose disregard for republican principles and the judiciary, coupled with his ability to turn supporters against individuals and businesses with a single tweet, makes him dangerous for democracy. Unlike most other politicians coming into public office, Trump has a base of power that extends beyond the power of the office of the presidency—a power that may allow him to do things that other presidents could not. Will this power that offers so much informal influence supersede the formal institutional powers bestowed by the Constitution?

While there is much still to study about the relationship between celebrity politics and democracy, it is beyond the scope of this work to engage extensively with this issue. This book does not endeavor to provide deep insights on whether celebrities empower quality citizens, demobilize an ignorant public that is otherwise hungry for social media and reality television, or mobilize the disenfranchised to support demagogues. However, this book does provide research that supports the empirical base of that literature, and to that extent it may be helpful to the extension of that academic discussion. If it can be shown that celebrities are adept at gaining attention for political issues, that they are more credible than traditional politicians are, and that they are uniquely persuasive, normative scholars will continue to wrestle with these normative challenges.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF CELEBRITY INFLUENCE

Political scientists have long assumed that public officials crave power in order to achieve their objectives. Powerful public officials also solicit the help of others who are powerful in the pursuit of their self-interest. Might celebrities have some “powers” not available to the ordinary politician that would enable them to influence political processes and outcomes? What powers might Bono have, for example, that Bush did not? The purpose of this book is to answer these questions.

Too Much Information: The Relationship between Celebrity and the Media

An understanding of celebrity power is only possible by understanding the growth of the mass media in the twentieth century and its interdependence with the growth of celebrity. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine celebrities with any significant influence without the existence of a media-drenched society. Granted, celebrities have skills that make them experts at communication. They evoke emotions through their physical abilities, their speech, their ability to tell stories or to relate to audiences through music. However, the media acts as a megaphone that increases the volume of celebrities’ voices and—to borrow President Teddy Roosevelt’s language—gives them a “bully pulpit” comparable to that of presidents and politicians.

Celebrities have been around at least since ancient Greece, although celebrated public figures of those days do not resemble those of today. Roots of modern celebrity can be traced to the eighteenth century as the earliest wide-circulation newspapers were established (Gunter 2014). Giuseppe Garibaldi, an Italian general and politician, is considered by some to be the first modern celebrity. Nineteenth-century British newspapers featured stories of his heroic exploits, and a small industry emerged around Garibaldi merchandise, including pictures, figurines, plates, cups, and tankards (Kehoe 2017). In the United States, Mark Twain copyrighted not only his books but also his name and image, using them to sell “playing cards, Oldsmobile cars, Pullman train passenger cars, baking flour, jumping frog mechanical banks, scrapbooks, photograph albums, cookbooks, postcards, sewing machines, shaving soap, fine china, decorative silver spoons, and, of course, whiskey and cigars” (Trombley 2010). Twain is an exemplar of one of the earliest modern American celebrities and an outspoken political satirist and critic—a reminder that politics, celebrity, and satire have been intertwined long before the powerful influence of Jon Stewart’s *Daily Show* and his successors: Stephen Colbert, Samantha Bee, and John Oliver.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, phonograph records, film, and radio placed singers, actors, and athletes in the national spotlight. The diversification of media access and the speed of delivery—from newspapers and books, records and films, to television and ultimately to the internet—created more demand for content and changed the kind of information that media organizations wished to deliver to their consumers (Adorno 2002; Fenster and Swiss 1999, 226; Marshall 1997, 63–64). As celebrities gained in public attention, they also grew in stature and sometimes in credibility. This attention led to political statements and activism, predating Bono, Affleck, Symmonds, and countless others by decades.

In the late 1920s, Will Rogers became one of the most influential celebrities in America and may likely be considered the father of modern celebrity activists, fully utilizing these emerging technologies. He started out as a circus and vaudeville performer, and millions watched his movies or listened to him on the radio. He wrote a weekly syndicated column for the *New York Times* between 1922 and 1935 in which he skewered American politicians across the political spectrum. He spoke at a Democratic National Convention; testified before Congress on flood relief; unofficially advised secretaries of war, aeronautics, and the Navy; and was a “frequent, savvy, and welcome presence in the hallways of the Capitol and in informal summits of the powerful” (Yagoda 2000, 293). According to biographer Ben Yagoda, he “became the political equivalent of a reversible figure—the psychological test in which a wavy line on a blank page can be seen to be either a table lamp or a human profile,” which enabled him to appeal to a broad spectrum of citizens because of—or despite—his political convictions. Politicians “knew better than to overlook what he had to say on the issues” (Yagoda 2000, 291–92). NPR’s Scott Simon argued that when Rogers passed away, “the most famous man in America besides Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and in 1935, I’m not sure you needed to add a ‘besides’” (Rogers, Sterling, and Sterling 1993; Simon 2015).

With the onset of the Great Depression and the ascension of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, the political atmosphere changed, and with it, the relationship among celebrities, politicians, and the media. In World War II, the entertainment industry was famously employed to produce pro-American propaganda in music and film. However, not all celebrities acted in concert with the U.S. government. Director/actor Charlie Chaplin satirized the “automation of the individual” in films such as *Modern Times* (1936) and Hitler himself in *The Great Dictator* (1940). He was booed at the premiere of *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) for criticizing American capitalism and weapons of mass destruction. In response to his criticism, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover publicly discredited Chaplin by using a paternity suit to bring criminal charges against him (Larcher 2011, 29; Maland 1991, 164, 204–5). Likewise, aviator Charles Lindbergh was famous for his transatlantic flight

and for what the media termed the “Crime of the Century”—the kidnapping and murder of his twenty-month-old son. In both cases, every major newspaper in the United States was willing to provide serial details of these events. As war with Germany loomed, Lindbergh became the spokesperson for the America First movement in 1940, which advocated isolationism and neutrality with Germany, and he charged that the British and the Jews were conspiring to bring America into the war. After speaking to overflow crowds in Madison Square Garden, he was publicly denounced by President Roosevelt (Duffy and Weiner 2010; Lardner 2015).

Prominent celebrities also pressured the government to support controversial stances on civil rights. Famous contralto Marian Anderson found herself in the middle of a dispute when the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her access to sing at Washington’s Constitution Hall because of her race. This event drew criticism and support for Anderson from Eleanor Roosevelt and the Roosevelt administration. As a result, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes arranged for her to perform at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 before a clearly integrated audience of 75,000 people (Stamberg 2014).

Likewise, President Eisenhower’s initially weak response to segregation at Central High School in Little Rock in 1957 drew fire from jazz musician Louis Armstrong, who was quoted on September 17 as saying, “The government can go to hell.” He cancelled his plans to appear on a goodwill tour to the Soviet Union, creating a public relations disaster for the U.S. government. Some citizens called for boycotts of Armstrong’s concerts, and the Ford Motor Company intended to pull advertising from a Bing Crosby special in which Armstrong was to appear. The controversy only ended when Eisenhower ultimately sent troops to Little Rock to enforce desegregation on September 24 (Margolick 2007).

The consequences were more dire for Paul Robeson, one of the most famous and respected celebrities of his day. As a singer, stage and film actor, and professional athlete, he spoke out on behalf of black culture and workers’ rights as early as 1934. He was ultimately blacklisted between 1950 and 1955, in part because of his advocacy of communism (Duberman 1996).

Those celebrities who spoke out against the United States or American capitalism were exceptional. Prior to the 1960s, celebrities were largely dependent upon their employers (A. W. Campbell 1994; Williamson 2011; Zirin 2009). In addition to the U.S. government’s attempts to convert entertainment material to propaganda and to blacklist anyone in the entertainment industry who might have expressed dissent, the industry itself also had mechanisms to prevent the free expression of its artists. In the early to mid-twentieth century, actors and musicians exclusively signed to a single studio or record company. Athletes, likewise, were not free agents. Movie studios, record companies, and sports teams were