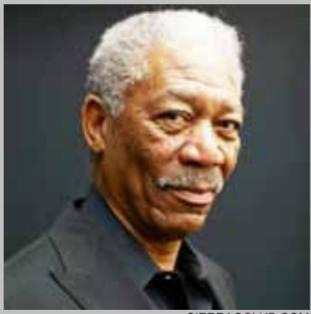


November 1, 2012

FACE  
OFF:Should celebrities endorse  
political candidates?

YES

NO



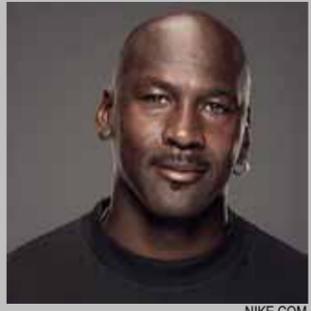
SIERRACLUB.COM  
**Morgan Freeman**  
for Barack Obama



EONLINE.COM  
**Lady Gaga**  
for Barack Obama



TELEGRAPH.CO.UK  
**Jon Bon Jovi**  
for Barack Obama



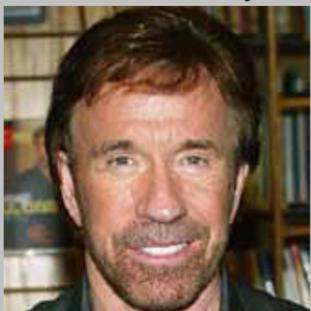
NIKE.COM  
**Michael Jordan**  
for Barack Obama



THEFILMSTAGE.COM  
**Vince Vaughn**  
for Mitt Romney



COUNTRYMUSICATTLETALE.COM  
**Lindsey Lohan**  
for Mitt Romney



BIOGRAPHY.COM  
**Chuck Norris**  
for Mitt Romney

by Jack McManus '13  
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

I understand that this seems like the less logical side of this argument in some ways—celebrities are stupid, right? Don't they represent the rampant superficiality and misguided value system of our flawed culture? Some might, but that's an oversimplification that robs credit from the handful of brilliant celebrity intellectuals that really do deserve it. It's easy to deride famous people for their socially-constructed status, but, based merely on the fact that they often have an attentive audience, these people have abilities that the vast majority of us undeniably do not. Every time a famous person performs, records, shoots, tweets or makes an appearance, their influence reaches thousands of adoring fans (sometimes known as eligible voters), a valuable asset that even the candidates themselves can't always match. Whether they deserve this power or not, it exists regardless, and many celebrities take the associated responsibilities very seriously.

As Americans like the rest of us, most musicians, actors and other celebrities feel strongly about how our nation is governed, and, accordingly, they side with candidates that best represent their views and interests. While we all exercise our power by voting, celebrities have the added ability to shape our nation's government by endorsing a candidate, theoretically influencing their fans' voting habits. As long as they're motivated by the genuine desire to make America the strongest nation it can be, I don't have any problem with them exerting this power over their available, largely consenting audience. Ordinary people do the same thing when they post about their chosen candidate on Facebook, slap a sticker on their car or stab a sign into their front yard—we're all just trying to help our own interests get fulfilled. We'd all like to make a difference; the difference is celebrities can. Especially for performing artists, the act of political endorsement also runs the risk of alienating sects of their fans, but if they're willing to take that risk, we should commend them for valuing their beliefs and our country's well-being over their own popularity and economic interests.

While I fully believe everything stated above, I admit that my argument is complicated by my use of "celebrity" as a comprehensive term. We can all agree that there's an ocean of difference between thoughtful, conscientious artists and the inexplicably popular Kardashian/Jersey Shore end of the celebrity spectrum. While I don't fundamentally object to the latter group making political

statements and endorsements, I'd like to remind everyone that we have the unrestricted freedom to ignore their opinions completely. However, in the case of true artists (which you can define however you like), I'd urge everyone to at least consider the merits of their political opinions. More so than any other professional group, it's the artists' duty to observe, interpret and reflect on the state of our society and culture, and the best ones carry out those duties respectfully. Listen closely to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* if you don't understand what I mean (it may seem so, but you'll just have



PHOTO BY LYNNE SLADKY | AP PHOTO

**Clint Eastwood addressed our invisible president.**

to trust that I'm not being cliché with this recommendation). Artists often delve into our society's issues more deeply than most of us are equipped or prepared to, and that informs their political decisions drastically. Putting aside the fact that I enjoy their music, I've heard both Roger Waters and Bruce Springsteen speak at length about the role of government, the importance of personal freedom and the way governments do, don't and ought to respect human rights and lives, and their intellect convinced me of their credible knowledge about matters of national importance, including elections. True artists should earn our trust in this way; it's their job to do so.

One can complain all day about the dangers of celebrityocracy and our society's misplaced admiration of the rich, talented and beautiful, but it's a foregone conclusion that these types have a certain amount of power over how our society functions. While some may not be trustworthy, others have proven the legitimacy of their ideas and deserve to be considered worthy sources of political influence. Of course, we all have the right to vote however we choose, but the health of our nation depends on our ability to enter the voting booth with a clear heart and educated mind, and anything that helps that process should be welcomed.

by Taylor Coe '13  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Celebrities should not endorse candidates. This is not to say that anyone should prevent them from announcing their support for a political party or candidate in an election—just that, in the ideal media culture, it would not happen.

But, at best, candidate endorsements are empty statements, anyway. See the Democratic reaction following Clint Eastwood's awkward entrance onto the stage at the Republican National Convention in Tampa.

use of the song).

In the past election cycle of celebrity endorsement, there was perhaps no moment more awkward than that in which *Rolling Stone* reporter Mikal Gilmore prodded Bob Dylan to profess his love for Obama. Gilmore's odd, quasi-interrogative pursuit of Dylan was all the more striking in that the master songwriter refused to play along. This interview—although it ultimately yielded no official endorsement—nevertheless manages to indirectly highlight the crucial distinction between art and artist.

Dylan, of course, assumed a voice of political change in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement, but that role was largely assigned to him by his listeners—it was not one that he picked for himself. Gilmore seemed to be under the impression that Dylan's endorsement of Obama would somehow situate itself alongside his earlier forms of political expression.

Art can often be political in a curious way: it is not political in the way that a stump speech or an op-ed in the newspaper is political. Politics in art is not straightforward. Even art that deals directly with political subjects still is only capable of addressing politics in a glancing manner. The line here between fact and fiction is crucial. You only need to watch the neatly-plotted political drama of Aaron Sorkin in relation to the endlessly complex and layered world of national politics to get the point.

On the other side of the issue, celebrity endorsement can needlessly politicize apolitical art. When Sean Penn endorses Obama, he inflects a certain political flavor into a film like *The Tree of Life*, which ultimately speaks to a more complicated relation to politics than Vote for Change. Ultimately, this politicization is an unintended consequence, but we cannot pretend that these consequences are not sometimes felt.

So, at the end of the day, who should be making endorsements? If we (idealistically) end up with silenced actors, artists and all the above famous-for-being-famous, then who does that leave us? Well—people whose thoughts matter in a more than cursory, popular way: politicians, journalists, newspapers, thinkers, activists. These are people who impact the political sphere in more ways than simply their 'endorsement.' While it is undeniable that certain celebrities (think: not Paris Hilton) can grapple in interesting and intelligent ways with our current political climate, their opinions should not be spoken in the same breath as those of Colin Powell or Bill Clinton.