

# NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

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## POLIWOOD: THE IMPACT CELEBRITIES HAVE ON POLITICS

Jennifer Cash  
Staff Writer

It's hard to believe it's already been a year since one of the biggest presidential elections in history. Barack Obama and John McCain were involved in a cutthroat competition that ultimately had the whole nation involved. The whole world wondered who would be the next American president? This election tried to target young adults who had never voted before and to get them involved in using their right to vote. Whether it was on Facebook, Myspace or Twitter, all of the candidates tried to reach young voters through some technological market. Celebrities also took to the social networks to voice their opinion on whom they were voting for. It seemed celebrities had a huge impact on the election. This gave director, Berry Levinson the idea to create a documentary, *Poliwood*, about the celebrity influence in politics.

This documentary features stars such as Susan Sarandon, Josh Lucas, and others that used their "celebrity" title to get their opinions out. As Americans we are all entitled to our opinions, but should celebrities be allowed to push their opinions into the public spotlight over and over? Everyone knew Oprah Winfrey supported Obama,

but is it fair that because she shared her support publicly more people followed Obama because they trusted Oprah's opinion? Some musicians gave concerts in support of certain candidates with all profits going to that candidate's campaign, but how fair is it if opposing party members attend that concert because they are fans of the band, yet their money goes to a candidate who they do not support?

Celebrities are like news reporters; they change the minds of viewers. For young voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, their knowledge of politics may not be as knowledgeable as someone who is older. Listening to a favorite celebrity go on about who he or she is voting for can make up a young voter's mind on which candidate to support. Using Oprah as an example, someone may vote for Obama just because Oprah supported him and that person likes Oprah. This should not be the case. When voting for a candidate, people should vote for who they support, not for whom some celebrity said was the best one. Director Berry Levinson quotes in the *Los Angeles Times*, "I think they [celebrities] can be

effective in shining light on certain things we're not paying attention to. I don't believe we should select a candidate based on what a celebrity does."

According to the *Sociological Inquiry*, when celebrities speak out on different subjects such as politics, they tend to alter the claims of what they are speaking on to influence people rather than just state their opinion. A poll taken after the 2004 Presidential Election between George W. Bush and John Kerry revealed that 49% of eighteen to twenty-four year olds based their votes off of celebrity endorsement. A study from Washington State University states that while having celebrities influence their personal opinions

on young voters is wrong, their influence is getting kids to the polls and getting them involved in voting. However, young people should vote for candidates based on their



Photo courtesy: [http://fashionindie.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/anne\\_hathaway.jpg](http://fashionindie.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/anne_hathaway.jpg)

## INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Aleigha Page  
Staff Writer

The week of November 16 marks International Education Week. We are all aware that the globe is forever shrinking, thus increasing the level of competition among students both academically and economically. School systems across the world have their different systems of operations. Is there a best or worst system? That is the great debate.

The United States was once a beacon of higher education across the world. However, it appears that in recent years, the US may be lagging behind in the world of education. Asian countries such as China, India, and Japan are quickly surpassing the United States' educational standards. Two tests administered internationally are able to support this theory. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) gave a test to over a

quarter of a million students worldwide. 41 countries participated in the testing. The US ranked 28th in math, 18th in reading, 22nd in science, and 29th in problem solving. Finland maintained first in all areas except for problem solving, which Korea took first in. Japan and Hong Kong were consistently among the top five scoring nations, along with Korea and Finland.

A math test given to ninth grade students around the world also produced interesting results. The highest percentile was scored by Singapore, with a 73rd percentile. The lowest score was 0, from Ghana. Massachusetts has the highest percentile, 51, in the United States. The lowest scoring state is Mississippi, with a 14th percentile. The United States is ranked in solid middle ground with other nations. Grant Phillips, of the American In-

stitute for Research states, "being in the middle of the pack is really a mediocre place to be."

Some blame the United States drop down to mediocre performance on a lack of initiative on students' part. The "feel-good" mentality has been engrained in students' minds over the past decade or so, and it has led to a decline in academic performance. "For Chinese children, doing well in school is a reflection of their family and ultimately their community. They have more motivation than American students," states John Dornan, Executive Director of NC School Forum.

China is making strides ahead of the US academically. In the United States, a third grade teacher can teach science with a degree in elementary education. In China, a third grade teacher

who teaches science will have a degree in science, according to Dave Murray of the Grand Rapids Press. By 2015, China is predicted to have twice the number of college graduates than America and Europe combined. However, common sense must play with this statistic; China has the world's largest population, so their graduates should be proportional to that population. But the other side of the coin is that Americans will be competing with the Chinese graduates in the global market; there is a valid concern that the Americans will not fare well in that competition.

Perhaps there is good news for American students yet; the amount of Chinese taught in American schools has doubled in the past 18 months.