**“Celebrity in American Culture: From Barnum to Blockbusters”**

**Instructor:** Lisa Rhodes

**Meeting Time:** Wednesday 3:15-4:45

**Meeting Place:** The Bishop’s House

**Course ID: 1544**

**Course Description:** Media is American’s second largest export and celebrities are an integral part of this industry. The modern celebrity dates from the early 19th century and is inextricably bound to the rise of American cities and the mass media. In this class, we will study celebrity’s beginnings as well as its evolution. Through the rise and fall of vaudeville, silent film, and radio, as well as the creation of modern electronic media, we will study and discuss the unique contributions made by celebrities to American culture.

Some of the central questions addressed by the sources you will read are:

How and why did American celebrity culture come about?

How did the Hollywood star system develop?

How did the creation of electronic media affect celebrity culture in America?

What was the relationship between the stars in vaudeville, radio and early television?

How do fans and fandom affect celebrity culture in the U.S.?

What role has censorship played in celebrity culture?

What has been the effect of celebrity culture on the American news media?

How have ideas of the “ownership” of celebrities changed over the years and why?

What has been the effect, so far, of the creation of new media on celebrity culture?

**Website:** A website has been created for this course. You can locate it at: [ollicelebrityinamerica@weebly.com](mailto:ollicelebrityinamerica@weebly.com)

**Readings:** The readings, which consist of articles and chapter excerpts from larger works, can be found on the website in the Readings section. The titles are active links and will take you directly to the readings when you click on them.

**Discussion Questions:** I have written study questions to accompany each reading. They can be found in the Discussion Question area on the website. Their purpose is to provoke thought and/or discussion and to be helpful during your reading. You don’t have to answer them, nor do we have to discuss them in class, although we can do so, if you like.

**Power Point Presentations:** There will be a Power Point presentation created to accompany each class. These will be posted on the website in the Classes section of the site. The names will be active links, so you can access them by clicking on title. The Power Points will be posted **after** I give the lectures.

**Resources:** In this section, I will provide you the names of supplementary materials for you to read, listen to or watch (or links to them, if possible). This section will be a work in progress, so check back often.

**Instructor’s Email:** [caltex6@verizon.net](mailto:caltex6@verizon.net) I will answer your messages as soon as I’m able, but plan for a 24 hour response and I won’t disappoint.

**Readings**

**September 17:** **An Introduction to the Study of Celebrity Culture**

No readings. An intro lecture on celebrity in America

**September 24: “Barnum, Humbug, and Jenny Lind, America’s First Modern Star”**

*The Arts of Deception: Playing With Fraud in the Age of Barnum,* “Introduction: Thinking With Tricks,” James Cook

“E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture,” Bluford Adams

**October 1: "Creation of the Hollywood Star System and the Censorship of Mae West"**

“The Discourse on Acting” Richard de Cordova

“Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It: Censoring Mae West” Marybeth Hamilton

**October 8:** **"Stars As Images: Hollywood and Elvis"**

“Stars As Images” Richard Dyer

“Elvis Presley and the American Dream” Peter Guralnik

**October: 15: "The Creation of the Radio Star"**

*Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom,* “Chapter 1: Radio and the Saliency of a Broadcast Star System,” Susan Murray

**October: 22: NO CLASS MEETING**

*Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom,* “Chapter 2: ‘A Marriage of Spectacle and Intimacy: Modeling the Ideal Television Performer”

**October 29:** **"The Creation of the TV Star and How Vaudeville Stars Influenced Early Television"**

*Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom,* “Chapter 4: ‘TV Is a Killer’: The Collapse of the Vaudeo Star and Television’s Talent Crisis”

**November 5: "Fans and Beatle-maniacs"**

“Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs

“Fandom As Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization” Joli Jensen

**November: 12:** **"Two Views on the Effects of Celebrity"**

“From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event” Daniel J. Boorstin

“Celebrity, The Tabloid and the Democratic Sphere,” Graeme Turner

**November 19:** **"The Gossip Columnist and Celebrity"**

“Walter Winchell: Stardom,” Neal Gabler

**November 26:** **"Scandal and Celebrity Journalism"**

“Systematizing Scandal: *Confidential* Magazine, Stardom, and the State of California,” Mary Desjardines

“Intimately Intertwined in the Most Public Way: Celebrity and Journalism,” P. David Marshall

**December 3:** **"Celebrity and New Media's Effects on Celebrity 'Ownership'”**

“The Private Ownership of People” Kembrew McLeod

“New Media-New Self: The Changing Power of Celebrity,” P. David Marshall