

OPINION

Tom and Jerry reach prime time



THE FINE PRINT
BY PAT MALACH

In English vocabulary brown doesn't exactly denote greatness. In fact, it is a pretty mundane word. Dirt and its cousin mud are usually brown. And of course, feces is brown. (Anyone who has drank a fair share of green beer on St. Patrick's Day could argue this point, however).

As a whole, (or hole), most of us would agree that brown is not a word we associate with power or wisdom. Ninety-nine percent of the time royalty will garner itself in rich colors like green, purple, gold, silver or red. Colors with character are the key. Brown just doesn't cut it.

But the much maligned and taken for granted brown got a boost in the arm recently on network television. No longer will brown be dismissed as a simple earthtone.

Brown, or more specifically, Jerry Brown, was the most colorful feature of a recent Democratic debate on one of our fine television networks. Despite being warned, along with the rest of the participants at the Democratic presidential candidate debate, not to solicit funds for his campaign, former California governor Jerry Brown had the nerve to repeatedly give out his toll-free campaign contribution number.

While pundits and punks alike characterized Brown's actions as turning the debate into a version of the Home Shopping Network, there could possibly be more to the story.

To start with, it is necessary to ask if a forum where candidates are allowed one minute to respond to questions about the

destiny of a country is even remotely an intellectual endeavor in the first place.

How could one candidate tarnish the image of such an event?

For a little perspective, it is interesting to note the network graciously allotting time for this 90-minute "debate" devotes one-half hour every night of the week, 52 weeks a year, to contestants on *Wheel of Fortune*.

But I digress.

Why search for the bigger picture when it's much easier to dismiss Brown's actions during the debate as those of a slightly radical politician who has earned the nickname "Moonbeam" for himself? Why look at the over-all message Brown may have been trying to get at and pass up the chance to ridicule a man who sets himself up for all the cheap shots any mindless fool can grasp?

For those of you who had better things to do than watch the Democratic candidate's "debate" let me summarize the main, and only point of Brown's platform: The political system in America has been stolen. It has been corrupted by influence in the form of money and campaign finance. Average tax-paying citizens are no longer the constituents of our leaders in Washington. Special interest groups — with the money to back up their beliefs — are.

Brown meandered back to this point every opportunity he had to speak. And then, finally, he did it, he gave out his toll-free campaign number saying he was trying to give the average American a chance to get back into politics. After all, 1,000 people giving \$2 apiece are twice as powerful as one person paying \$1,000 a plate to eat lunch with the current president.

But like the true minion of the mighty he is paid to be, moderator Tom Brokaw employed his boyish smirk to make Brown look like a cheap fool degrading the integrity of such an honorable event.

Brown, of course, did little to help out his cause. His one-plank platform offered few alternatives to the corrupt system (other than his 1-800 number).

Deep in their hearts most Americans know the country's politics have abandoned them. What they are looking for is the message that provides a way out. Brown's nihilistic exposure of the problem did not offer any solutions, which only served to put him on the same level as the average viewer.

So in the end, Brown — and infinitely more important — his message, unable to rise above the masses and articulate a vision of the hero this country so desperately — albeit quietly — craves, will be easily dismissed by a smirking Brokaw and a few lazily conceived one-liners in the media.

And in November, '92 the country will faithfully turn out to vote for the image of the presidential hopeful that is most successfully sold in one-minute sound bites by the candidate's Madison Avenue advertising firm.

In the absence of a hero, or even a heroic message, less than 50 percent of Americans will show up to — as George Bush told us on May 27 1991 — "chart a moral course through a world of lesser evils."

That's the real joke.

Pat Malach is managing editor of the Emerald.



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By GARY LARSON



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