

Part II: The Triumph and Tragedy of Bill Cosby

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON, PH.D.

The occasion was the Academy of TV Arts and Sciences' Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in 1992. The star-studded crowd chuckled at the one liners delivered by its principal inductee, Bill Cosby. But the laughter stopped when Cosby turned serious and accused white film and TV writers of "massacring" the black image on screen. The indictment seemed ironic coming from the man whom America anointed as its most treasured father figure. It was doubly ironic because it pointed to much of the media and public's schizoid nature in making a black man their symbol of positive parenting at a time when they busily branded black men with the crime-drugs-violence-derelict label. If any black had earned a passport from negative stereotyping it appeared it was Cosby. But he knew better.

Even amidst the hyper-adulation there were disturbing signs that Cosby was not immune from racial problems. A civil jury found him partly liable for assaulting a white photographer during an argument. There was no proof that he did. Even though the jury held the photographer 90 percent liable for the altercation, it still re-

quired Cosby to pay him damages of 20 cents. Much of the public laughed, but a bitter Cosby quipped "he's to blame but I must still pay."

Cosby's movies Leonard Part VI, Ghost Dad, and the Cosby Mystery Series were flops. Critics attributed their failure to lousy plots and poor writing, but, in truth, the public was loath to accept Cosby as anything other than an all-wise-sit-com TV dad. And this reflected a deeper problem. While the Cosby Show ended, there is still no network dramatic series with a black star. Sit-coms from Living Single to Seinfeld, with their virtually all-white and all black casts, are as segregated as ever. And black sit-coms are as buffonish as ever.

Even the media that patted itself on the back for its deferential treatment of Cosby after his son's murder still made sly references to Cosby's early problems with Ennis and reminded the public of his well-publicized estrangement from his daughter, Erin after her drug problems. Cosby, sensing the danger from a media trained to sniff scandal, pleaded for it to act "dignified." This momentarily blunted the media feeding frenzy.

But Cosby took what could potentially be harmful missteps. He challenged the tabloid media to pay for information on his son's murder instead of paying for smut on he and his family. The Globe (\$200,000) and National Enquirer (\$100,000) happily took him up on it. This gave

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them a permanent hook in the case, and that almost certainly includes any dirt they can dig up along the way. This could hamper the investigation by deluging the police with a barrage of false leads or damaging gossip from crazies and cash seeking opportunists. It also set a hor-

rible precedent in encouraging the tabloid media to pay for information in a criminal case.

Next, Cosby told CBS's Dan Rather that he thought of getting a 357 Magnum and blowing away the murderer of one of his children. In that moment Cosby turned from a

grieving and sympathetic parent into a vengeful and vindictive vigilante ready to chuck the court legal system. This could reinforce the increasingly fashionable notion that frontier-style justice is ok in America.

Cosby topped that by suggesting that the attorney for the killer should

accept the same sentence as his client if convicted. Was Cosby saying that a defendant had no right to a legal defense? And that a defendant's Constitutional right to a fair trial should be scrapped?

Cosby then made the bombshell confession that he had a "rendezvous" with another woman (i.e. an extra marital affair) twenty years ago. He probably felt compelled to reveal this after the arrest of a twenty-year old woman who claimed to be his illegitimate daughter for attempting to extort \$40 million from him. His denial would have been enough for much of the public. But then he told Rather that their was the "possibility" he was the woman's father. Many Americans certainly are no longer shocked by the sexual hijinks of celebrities and public figures. They might applaud him for his candor and courage and forgive his "sin." But Cosby's self-indictment for private acts could have damaging public consequences. Particularly since many Americans, driven by religious belief and neo-Victorian family values, overwhelmingly (70 percent in a 1996 opinion survey) regard adultery as "harmful to marriage." A substantial number

also think that there is absolutely no excuse for it. The message is that the public may accept philandering from politicians and celebrities but not from the number one dad who paid sacred homage to marriage in his best seller, Love and Marriage.

But Cosby in between the quips in Love and Marriage understood the fragile twists, turns and traps that can imperil a marriage. "There are no rules; you just wing it. A wing and a prayer, that's what marriage is."

And that points to one more problem. America sometimes has a nasty habit of turning on its black heroes at the first hint of scandal. The Cosby revelation could make some think that if one of America's best and brightest black men can be smitten by wayward sexual lusts then maybe there's something to the racist myth of the sex-crazed black male.

The black image that Cosby accused white writers of "massacring" could be a dooming self-prophecy for him. That would be a tragedy for the man who has made us laugh so long and feel good about ourselves. And it would be our tragedy too.

Responses may be sent by e-mail to Earl Ofari Hutchinson: ehutchi344@aol.com

State Treasurer streamlines

State Treasurer Jim Hill, in an effort to save money and streamline Treasury operations, has signed a contract with State Street Bank and Trust Company that will consolidate a number investment functions under a single financial institution. State Street Bank was selected after Treasury conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the major global custody banks in the market. The investment funds managed by Treasury will realize about \$21 million in savings over the four year program term.

As the State Treasurer's custody bank, State Street is responsible for

settling all trades and transactions for all funds managed by the Treasury, including the Public Employee Retirement Fund, which currently stands at \$24 billion. State Street will also provide financial reporting and maintain the safekeeping of all state securities.

"This is a substantial and direct savings to the funds that we have under management," Hill said. "We are consolidating from three custodial banks to one, which results in a savings of approximately \$3.3 million per year, in custody fees alone. In addition, we expect to increase the

funds' earnings from securities lending."

"Our goal with this new agreement was to save state and local governments' money, while increasing our efficiency and accountability. We are now paying less for our investment accounting services and receiving better, more efficient financial reporting."

Under the new custodial contract, State Street Bank, located in Boston, Massachusetts, will perform investment accounting and income collection functions, as well as administer the securities lending program.

Heritage Pageant

Girls between ages 13-18 can represent their city or state by entering the 1997 Black Heritage International Scholarship Pageant. There is no registration fee to enter. Deadline is March 15, 1997. Participants must be enrolled in school and present a talent (orator, dance, sing, model, play an instrument, etc.).

To enter send \$1.00 for your information packet, made payable to:

Young World Talent Foundation, Inc., P.O. Box 19234, Chicago, Illinois 60619. Black Heritage International Pageant will end the 1997 Youth Conference 97, to be held July 3, 4, 5, 6, in Chicago Illinois. Sponsors Young World Talent Foundation Inc., is asking Adults, Churches, Clubs & Organizations-civic and social to support their national committee in your city and state.



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Refugee status requirements revised

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has revised the requirements for refugees who wish to have their spouses and children join them in the United States as derivative refugees, and broadened the category of those eligible to file Form I-730 Refugee Relative Petitions.

A policy memorandum issued August 27, 1996, changes the time at which a relationship had to exist between a refugee filing an I-730 and a spouse or child. Now the relationship must have existed prior to the refugee's admission to the United States and must continue to exist at the time of filing for "fol-

lowing-to-join" benefits and admission. Previously, the relationship had to exist when the refugee's status was approved.

Under the new policy, if the refugee proves that he is the parent of a child who was born after his admission as a refugee, but the child was in utero on the date of the admission, the child shall be eligible to follow-to-join the refugee. If she is not the principal refugee, the child's mother shall not be eligible to follow-to-join the refugee unless she was married to the refugee on the date of his admission.

The policy also broadens the category of those eligible to file I-730's.

Now a person admitted to the United States as a relative of a refugee, but who is not the refugee's spouse or unmarried child under 21 years of age, may be able to file an I-730 for his own spouse and children.

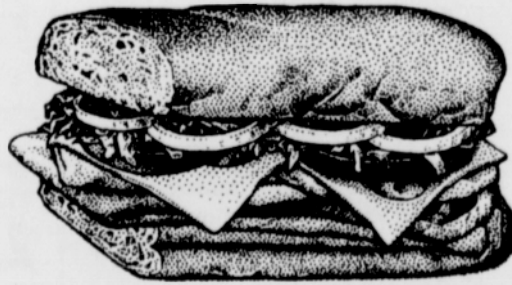
Most of the refugees admitted to the United States come from Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Romania, Somalia, the former Soviet Union and Vietnam.

People who may benefit from this new policy should file a new I-730, with accompanying documentation, to the appropriate INS Service Center.

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