

Losing the great American hero

Bill Cosby falls from pedestal of father figure, role model to ordinary 'Joe'

Perhaps the saddest day in a child's life is the day he or she learns there is no Santa Claus. This brush with reality forever steals a bit of the idealism which comes with childhood, making the world a little less magical.

Americans had an ugly brush with reality last week with the conclusion of the Autumn Jackson extortion case.

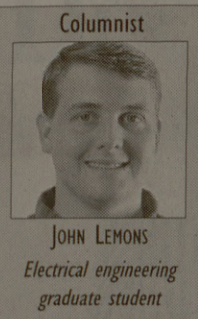
While a jury found Jackson guilty of trying to extort \$40 million from entertainer Bill Cosby, facts revealed in the case will sully Cosby's reputation as America's preeminent dad.

This case is significant because it typifies how the United States has lost its heroes. The heroes who are conspicuously absent from popular culture are not the sports stars who dazzle Americans with their athletic prowess, but men and women who challenge their fellow citizens to follow higher ideals. This vacuum of moral leadership robs Americans of the ideals they need in order to respect one another — the ability to face themselves in the mirror.

Undoubtedly, Cosby is a national treasure. No other modern public figure embodies family values quite like him. Through his hit television series, "The Cosby Show," Cosby entered American homes once a week to teach and entertain without being preachy or condescending. His show portrayed an ideal family, where there were two parents who loved their children, and kids who were obedient and respectful.

Through the show, Cosby taught Americans that love and responsibility can allow a family to overcome problems and raise healthy, happy children. This was a message that transcended the United States' own stumbling blocks along the lines of race, class and religion.

In the extortion case, Jackson con-



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tended that she is Cosby's illegitimate daughter.

During his testimony in the trial, Cosby admitted he had an affair with Jackson's mother in 1974. Cosby said, however, he is not Jackson's father.

"I will be for you a father figure," Cosby said to Jackson, "but I am not your father."

Furthermore, Cosby testified he paid Jackson's mother, Shawn Upshaw, \$100,000 over 20 years to keep the extramarital affair a secret.

After the jury found Jackson guilty of extortion on Friday, Cosby released a statement through his lawyer.

"The Cosbys appreciate the efforts of the prosecutors who rendered a just verdict," the statement said.

What remains to be seen, however, is the verdict Americans will render on Bill Cosby in the court of public opinion. While Cosby was the victim in the trial, his image as father figure to this nation will suffer in the aftermath.

The heroes of America's past are dead, dying or lost. Consider two uniquely American heroes, Jimmy Stewart and Billy Graham. Stewart died earlier this month. For over 50 years, Stewart represented the values that Americans have treasured most within themselves.

When World War II came, Stewart patriotically volunteered to defend his country, and in his movie roles, he consistently portrayed characters who held fast to their good values in a trying world.

Evangelist Billy Graham has been inspiring Americans since the '40s, and he has held the ear of every president since Dwight Eisenhower. But the United States will soon lose Graham, as he is struggling with Parkinson's disease.

The problem with a vacuum of moral leadership is that Americans



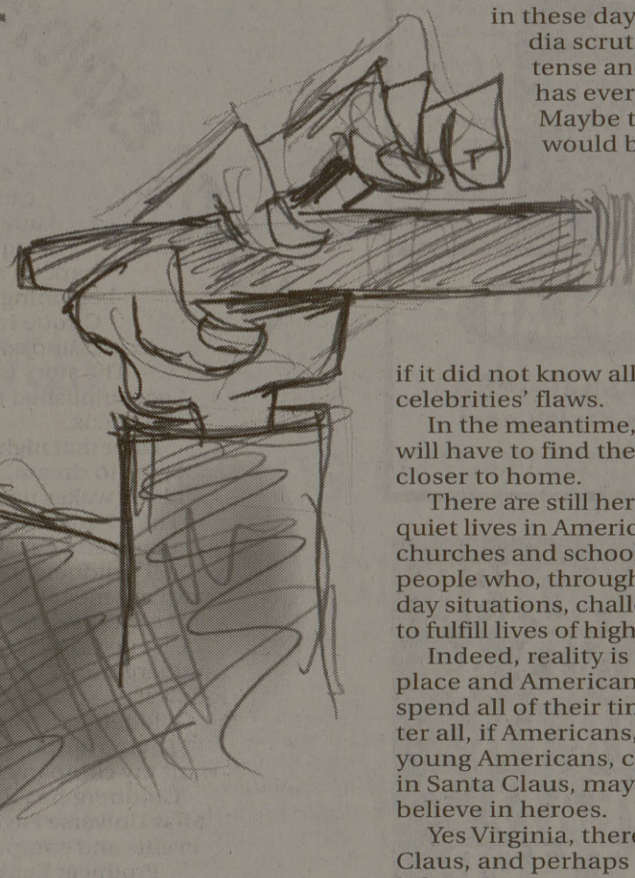
lose respect for themselves and their leaders. At one point in time, Americans revered their presidents as paragons of honesty and integrity. Those days, however, are gone. Consider President Clinton and the Paula Jones sexual harassment allegations. The most disturbing aspect of the case

is not whether the president propositioned Jones in a hotel room, but that most Americans consider Clinton capable of those actions.

This country needs ideals, and it could use a face to personify those ideals. Nature, however, abhors a vacuum. Thus, something will fill this vacuum of moral leadership. Currently, the most likely candidate to fill that vacuum is contempt — contempt that is apparent in Americans' cynicism toward government and politicians.

Obviously, no one is infallible. Americans who place their faith in the actions of public figures are

bound to be disappointed in these days when media scrutiny is as intense and nosy as it has ever been. Maybe the country would be better off



if it did not know all of its celebrities' flaws.

In the meantime, Americans will have to find their heroes closer to home.

There are still heroes leading quiet lives in America's towns, churches and schools. These are people who, through their everyday situations, challenge others to fulfill lives of high character.

Indeed, reality is a harsh place and Americans need not spend all of their time there. After all, if Americans, namely young Americans, can believe in Santa Claus, maybe they can believe in heroes.

Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, and perhaps a few heroes left, too.

GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber



MAIL CALL

UT comments spark debate over mascots

In response to Cris Angelini and Rob Dunn's July 23 Mail Call:

How can someone who goes to the University of Texas and lives in Austin honestly make any reference to "civilized societies?" Any place such as Austin with that many politicians running around free is obviously corrupt and immoral.

You tell Aggies to "get over it" — it's just a damned dog! At least we honor our dead — yes, even our mascot. This is more than I can say for you t-shirts. At least Aggies don't carve up our dead mascots and serve them at the school cafeteria on surf-n-turf day, let alone send the bones to the local glue factory for a profit.

And what would t-shirts know about war heroes? How can honoring a dog be an insult to someone who lost a family member in armed conflict? My uncle was killed in Pearl Harbor. It makes me proud

that my school honors its mascot in the same way my uncle was honored after his death.

As for football teams, how can anyone take you guys seriously with a quarterback named James Brown, not to mention those ugly, burnt-orange, polyester clown suits you call uniforms.

I hope the students who decide to be brave and come back to Texas A&M for this year's game don't think that they can desecrate Kyle Field the way others did two years ago. That won't be an option, because we're gonna Beat the Hell Outta t.u.

Todd C. Dixon
Class of '95

Ross M. Hinman
Class of '96

Kinesiology classes should be optional

In response to Jay Ratcliff's July 23 Mail Call:

I would like to thank Ratcliff for correcting my erroneous statements about kinesiology classes and their coaches. To all of our valuable coaches, I apologize. But let me give a valid argument against required kinesiology classes.

Four kinesiology classes cost a total of \$288 if you include tuition, the general use fee and the \$16 physical education fee. A conservative estimate for the amount of time a kinesiology class takes is two

hours per week (actual class time plus walking, driving, etc.).

Throughout four classes, this comes out to 112 hours of your day-time college career. If you are a student worker like me who makes about \$5 an hour and needs all the hours you can get, this comes out to \$560 you could have earned if kinesiology classes were not mandated.

So the total cost of four required classes is at least \$850 when you factor in actual and opportunity costs. This is a great deal of money to me and most other college students. Mandatory kinesiology classes make it harder for some students to struggle through college without huge debts piling up. But the biggest waste is the amount of time these classes take.

People who enjoy kinesiology should have the option of taking the classes, but I would rather choose when and how I enrich my life, whether I am working, studying or utilizing my \$50 Rec Center fee. Kinesiology classes are not some magical solution to America's health problems as Ratcliff has implied.

And to people such as Ratcliff who brand the word "idiot" on someone else's forehead after reading one letter: Lighten up. We are all human beings, and we are all prone to err from time to time. Just because I was wrong doesn't make me stupid.

Carl Roth
Class of '99

Politics get in the way of voting for qualified runners

The Republicans' "Contract with America" must be a contract for some rousing good old-fashioned entertainment.

Newt Gingrich is currently enjoying the fruits of the old adage, "Failed coups are good for the king," while Texas Rep. Richard Arme is quoting Homer. Not the Greek writer, but the one famous for a distinctive noise made whenever things don't seem to go in his favor.

This entire situation should be a klaxon call for American voters to take a serious look at how parties seem to be replacing the constitution as the supreme law of the land. Instead of focusing on what's best for the nation, the focus is easily bent to examine which party screwed up most recently.

Gingrich, who has been out of the limelight since his little ethics violation, is obviously taking a pretty good public relations spin with this peasant uprising. Everywhere, whether it's on television or in the newspaper, Gingrich appears to have a spring in his step, a smile on his face and "balanced budget" and "tax cuts" on his lips. Perhaps this quarrel inside the party is going to get the Republican revolution moving again.

But voters are numb to those terms. It's been a long time since the American people have been treated with real honesty from the floor of the House of Representatives. It's going to take more than sound bites and a smiling Newt to recover from this latest blow to the party.

The Grand Old Party — hardly a fitting name for it anymore — has had trouble staying unified since the collapse of communism. Without its traditional adversary to target, the party has lost its focus to the Democrats, who win on domestic issues by default. President Clinton's waffling early on in his administration showed that domestic issues are the preferred problem area of Democratic administrations.

If Gingrich decides to oust Arme, this will spell the final end for the Republican party. Many may cheer its demise, but Gingrich is the only one who can decide which way the pendulum will swing, if in any direction.

Dick Arme, was touting the same issues Gingrich was on television this Sunday, possibly in order to save his neck. Gingrich should tout one maxim: "Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer."

A seasoned politician such as Gingrich should be familiar with that strategy, but to put it to use is a different story. To do this, he must accomplish two things. First, he must get a vote on the balanced budget this week, before Congress adjourns for the summer recess. And sec-



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only, he must make Arme and other dissident Republicans look at the chair as a focal point, not the seat of ultimate power. Good luck. Every Representative on the Hill thinks they should be speaker, just like every senator thinks that he or she should be president. The American voters need convincing from a higher source.

Carl Bernstein, the journalist famous for the Watergate expose, wrote an interesting column about a possible solution to this partisan bickering in our government.

In Sunday's Houston Chronicle, Bernstein advocates a non-partisan commission, headed up by former presidents Ford, Carter and Bush, with membership ranging from clergy to businessmen and congress officials. Their mission would be to report on what changes need to be made to the electoral process to get things right again.

This sounds similar to another non-partisan committee whose job was to examine and evaluate what was wrong with the way our country does things. That commission didn't come up with changes, but produced a whole new constitution. This radical shift in government left us with a clear plan of how government was supposed to function. Alexander Hamilton sums up the situation quite well.

"And it will rarely happen that advancement of the public service will be the primary object either of party victories or party negotiations," he said in Federalist Paper No. 76.

So it would seem that American voters should disregard Gingrich and friends as being harmful to the system and expunge parties all together. It would be difficult, as corporate money is the real steam behind the activities of any federally elected official today. James Madison once said that parties should not be disregarded.

"An extinction of parties," Madison said, "necessarily implies either a universal alarm for the public safety, or an absolute extinction of liberty." This founding father's defense of the constitution might seem a little dated after many Supreme Court decisions that have shifted the focus away from small, constitutional-minded government. Perhaps Bernstein's solution wouldn't be half bad — but there already is a commission in place to monitor Washington: the concerned and active citizens need to make themselves heard.

The bottom line, as usual, is a compromise. Voters always should keep an eye of suspicion on both parties, and vote for the candidates who will best represent their own views. When voters get too wrapped up in voting straight ticket, it allows silly coups to get attention while the real problems our country faces are overlooked and ignored.

