

Reel to Real

by Shekhar Deshpande

Take your pick. What would you like to choose for today's menu of nuggets of knowledge? The President drops his pants in a hotel suite or a former football player and current actor, endorser of comfort products, kills two adults leaving behind a hot trail of evidence, leaked or otherwise? Mind you, the presumption of innocence is with them (or, as Darth Vader says in Star Wars, May the Force be With You).

Welcome to late twentieth century America. A world too surreal to be real in any sense at all. Welcome to the pathologies of the media age, justice system run amuck and market system calling the shots in virtually everything, including whether someone gets the death penalty or not.

There's nothing we can say here that has not been said in the past week or so since the "Brentwood" murders.

All sides have been presented: a police depart-



ment that has the credibility slightly less than that of Pinnochio's has leaked important evidence to the consuming public, the talk shows (curiously named "Crossfire," one of them) have tried out possible scenarios of conviction, plea bargaining, death penalty, insanity defense, mob-did-it theories and what-have-you constructions; tabloid television has taken out its new glossy checkbooks to advance the cause of journalism and the rumor mills are churning everything on that bizarre form of media called talk radio.

The next few months promise to be exciting, almost as "exciting" as the days of the gulf war (Indeed CNN chalked up its highest ratings since the Gulf War). It makes sense to wake up in the middle of the night and turn on the television and you are bound to get at least some and perhaps a lot of excitement. All of that until something else happens. Let's just predict something for the heck of it (the chances that this will happen are more than not). Lets say the North Koreans appoint Carter the President of the Unites States or more credibly, the Secretary General of the United Nations. Or, four U. S. senators get castrated in the middle of an illegal orgy. Just for fun, anyway.

What's happening here? In the case of O. J., the culture at large will have an opportunity to play out its demons. For example, there will be a backlash against the insanity de-



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fense. The mainstream white American culture will have an opportunity to work out its fears about the fame, the strength and audacity of a black man who marries and then murders a white woman. All of that will be carried out in code words like "wife abuse," reminiscent of the welfare bums debate or the crime problem in this country.

There will be a short soul searching about the fall of high paid athletes and entertainers, mostly blacks, who made good either running, pushing, jumping or singing. We will talk about the "fall" of another American hero, but what people will mean would be the downfall of another good black

man, already a socially endangered species. For those who seek ethical peace and normative justice, these will be disturbing times. The whole world will appear topsy turvy as we contemplate the death penalty to a hall of famer. True, some of us will try to maintain our sanity (so to speak) by not watching "Hard Copy," "Geraldo," or "A Current Affair." But then we will have to fight to talk about something meaningful. And those around us who know a whole lot more about O.J., Larry King and wife beating will appear smarter and the rest of us will have to be content to keep quiet and hope that this too shall pass!