



# The Mother of All Logies

(How) Could things get worse? The darling of the testosterone world, the sports hero, the movie star and the perpetual celebrity of Brentwood, California, O. J. Simpson has pried open new chapters in media-logy, criminology, mob psychology and just plain stupid-logy with his alleged implication in two murders, one of them his own ex-wife.

If he did commit these murders, and if he knows fully what is happening outside his cell, he must wonder how he caused all this to spin off his criminal act. Even to most prognosticators, this seems unbelievable, but true in a sensational way. If O. J. didn't commit these murders, he must be astonished at the scope of public interest, and hope that his well paid lawyers can cut through this and get him home, free to play golf with his charming corporate sponsors.

Either way, this is an earth shaking event (in the same sense that a puny annual championship event is a "world series," or a "world championship.") Our conception of world is shrinking with enlarging egos. It is causing tremors in the world of politics,

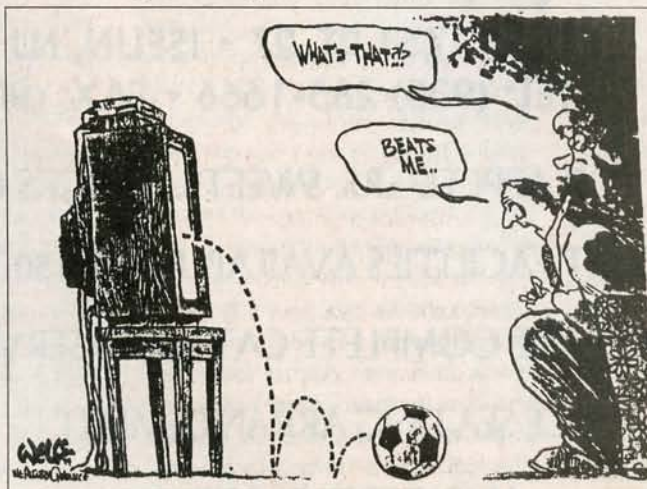
crime and communications.

The Attorney General of California has asked that the court trial be held back till people had a chance to think about their political candidates and vote in the elections. Luckily, the judge sees no point in bending the rules to accommodate the larger lying game of politics. All state employees, including the district attorneys who have been involved in law as a side-activity on their way to big offices will have to tighten and "professionalize" their work, after having faced smart lawyers and technical experts who have exposed their incompetence and usual shoddiness glossed over so far by their authority. Law schools around the country are taping the proceedings in the courtroom as

teaching tools for criminal law.

And, in the media industry, the story goes very very far. Many dissertations may not address adequately the scope and impact of this trial on the cheap mindedness of media executives, tabloid or otherwise, and on the shaping of American psyche. CNN has published a CD-ROM on the Simpson case, allowing users to enter the story at any point, to examine the evidence in all its combinations and act as Perry Mason or to solve what has been dubbed in the hyperactive enthusiasm as the "greatest" and "most sensational" murder trial of the century. Or, wait, may be forever!

Larry King has already lost it and is speeding toward lunacy in his nightly grab of the O. J. case. There is nothing that he hasn't covered. He has asked former convicts about what it is like to stay in the jail and wait for the dreaded trial. And you thought only Ross Perot knew how to use TV. Scores of news programs, which have sprung up like wild mushrooms all over the TVscape, consider it a matter of professional responsibility to touch upon some part of the O. J. story.



The newsmagazines (*New Yorker*, *Newsweek* etc.) have joined the chorus in bringing out sleazy articles and cover stories while Rome (or its equivalents) is burning.

What happened to the Healthcare Security Act? And, since when has prevention of crime become pork barrel politics? The bums in Congress (as in "throw the bums out"), as well as the President are fiddling around with literal life and death issues with petty and mean-minded maneuvers because the rest of the country is either vacationing with dope, a whole generation is dancing in the mud to music it does not understand, or everyone is too busy acting detective on how O. J. could have had a bad hamburger with his housekeeper and spent the next two hours killing his own ex-wife and her friend. We all know O. J. is fast, but he is not that fast!

There is a conception that people in the Beltway (around Washington, D.C.) don't understand the real issues that average Americans face on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the people in the Beltway run the country, so what they think about matters a lot. All of that should be modified to say that the mindsetters in the media, in the offices of executives and editors, in the control rooms and on the editing floors, that is where the nation's script is written. It matters little what the people are going through.

That is why the media keep spinning out these surveys about the connection between race and the O. J. case. What do we find? Here's a big surprise! African Americans think that O. J. didn't do it. These surveys have helped perpetuate the stereotypes of all kinds. Then the self-righteous people think that African Americans don't have a sense of fairness, for they support criminals of their own race.



When you are walking down an alley, or talking loudly in a white neighborhood, or simply happen to be in a "wrong place at the wrong time," you are looked at suspiciously. Never mind, your job status, your education or your intent. The color of your skin supersedes the content of your character. And, if you are slightly on the wrong side of law, the treatment you receive is strong and unfair enough to taint your opinion of a criminal justice system for ages to come. If your everyday experience with the criminal justice system is not comforting, why would you believe that O. J. will get or is getting fair treatment? The questions these wise survey pundits should be asking are: If O. J. is proven guilty, do you believe he will get the death penalty? If O. J. weren't as rich, do you believe he would have gotten a fair shake in the system? If his (allegedly) victims weren't white, would you ask the questions of racial bias?

The editorials in Europe and in other parts of the world are expressing shock and dismay at the O. J. obsession in this country. Whatever doubt they had about prevailing sanity here are washed away watching a televised crime (especially the "Ford Bronco

chase") scene.

Marlowe Hood says in *Eastern Express* (Hong Kong) that such "crimes in progress" have become "TV programs" worthy of ratings calculations, thus sinking the civilized restraint to new unexplored depths. Alistair McAlpine, in *The European*, warns that "such circus of justice" must never be allowed to happen anywhere else.

Before something like this happens in another part of the world — and this is the important lesson of the O. J. saga — a lot more needs to happen first. A whole populace needs to be fed "boob tube therapy" starting with cops and crime shows, tabloid ravages of simple events, and a general crop of programs blurring the line between reality and fiction. Mix some deep seated racist attitudes, misogynist portrayal of women, blended with sex and fluff and a steady numbing of social nerves with a philosophy of self-indulgence and selfishness and then wait for someone who is famous for just being famous commit crime or get implicated in one. Prepare a whole culture to go through this trauma as if it is another rating bonanza and then this could happen anywhere.

— Shekhar Deshpande