

What these guys really need is a good press agent

Once upon a time there was a land where people became famous by working hard, triumphing over incredible odds, and achieving spectacular results. Fame was directly attached to achievement. People who misbehaved or committed crimes were shunned by their community and quarantined by the media.

How strange this fantasy world must seem to us today. For in the late 20th century, it is those who do wrong, commit crimes, break laws who are often on the receiving end of priceless

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publicity, media attention, book deals, movies of the week, and lucrative marketing schemes. Apparently, the meek shall not inherit the Earth; the hoodlums shall — and have.

Because a person excels at breaking the law, however, does not mean that he or she will be adept at milking said misdeed for all its potential promotional value. That's where the professional publicist comes into play. Like it or not, a top-notch press agent can make the difference between the law-breaker ending up as an answer in a Trivial Pursuit game and one whose name becomes burned into the public consciousness as a celebrity spokesperson, business entrepreneur, or motivational speaker.

For but a sampling of what the publicist can do not only to salvage the wrongdoer's reputation, but actually turn his or her foul deed into a dynamic, life-long gravy train, the following are my suggestions for putting a great spin on the unfortunate circumstances of these celebrities' lives:

► **O.J. Simpson:** The man is in serious need of replenishing his funds. I would have him start visiting restaurant kitchens. No, not to hand out food to the poor — but to demonstrate the effectiveness of the gold-plated O.J. Knife — twice as sharp as the Ginsu. Cuts through anything. Act now and receive this limited-edition collection of all 250 O.J. alibi collector cards, good for any occasion, including the ever-popular, "Sorry, honey, I can't make it — I'm practicing my golf swing."

► **Susan Smith:** Unfortunately, Mrs. Smith will not be requiring the services of a publicist for another 30 years. Once she's released from prison, however, a world of options awaits,



MIKE TYSON

Once he regains the championship, he could do no better than to move into a monastery, forsaking women forever. Every few months, he could participate in a charity boxing match, against one of his fellow monks.

from driver education instructor, to day-care-center operator, to mob hit-woman, and, alas, actress. Chances are, however, she will become born-again, write a best-selling confessional book that will be excerpted in the tabloids, go on the lecture circuit, run for Congress or mayor of Washington, D.C., become indicted in some high-level government scandal, and end up back in prison anyway. So she might as well just stay there and save herself and us the trouble.



Kerry Waghorn/Chronicle Features

HUGH GRANT

This handsome movie star: a) showed the world he was human, b) proved he does not discriminate, c) demonstrated he has an active libido, and d) received millions of dollars worth of publicity for his meager investment.

► **The Menendez Brothers:** Never underestimate the value of self-publicity, and these two have done a ton of it already. Obviously, these are the poster boys for dysfunctional families: And who better than they to appear in a new, heart-warming family-oriented show on CBS, combining the best elements of "The Waltons," "Bonanza," and "The Brady Bunch"? I would promote Eric and Lyle as men of action, who, rather than sweep their problems under the rug or run away from them,

choose to confront them head on, deal with them, and resolve the situation. There's something ultimately very American about that.

► **John Wayne Bobbitt:** Every once in a great while, a celebrity comes along who turns out to be the perfect match for promoting a given product. Such is the case with John Wayne Bobbitt and the insurance industry. For who better to sell the American male on life insurance than a man who experienced a profound loss and yet bounced back stronger than ever? Of course, Replaceable Limb Insurance has never been a huge slice (pardon the expression) of the insurance pie. But if John Wayne Bobbitt sold it, you can bet American males would reach for their wallets as they covered their groins.

► **Heidi Fleiss:** The woman already has her own chain of clothing stores, but there is so much more that could be done with and for her. First off, she's already spent so much time with Charlie Sheen that America practically knows them as couple. And why not? I see them as the next Hope and Crosby, doing a series of road movies: "Road to Bordello," "Road to Sing Sing," "Road to \$250 for All Night, But if You Want Anything Weird It's Gonna Run You Extra." Ultimately, I'd like to see Heidi working as a full professor at Stanford University, lecturing in the interdisciplinary areas of sex and economics. You can bet there'd be a lot of volunteering for extracurricular work.

► **Rodney King:** Why should Betty Ford have a monopoly on substance-abuse clinics? After all, she wasn't particularly known for getting sloppy drunk, breaking the law, and having the living "Go #1" beat out of her. But Rodney King was. Furthermore, not content to rest on his laurels, King to this day continues to get arrested regularly for drunken driving. I would establish a nationwide — nay, a worldwide chain of Rodney King Substance Abuse Clinics. King, of course, would do the commercials, borrowing that wonderful line from the Hair Club for Men: "I'm not only the president; I'm a client."

► **Hugh Grant:** Think what you like about his recent debacle, with a mere \$60. Hugh Grant, this incredibly handsome, talented movie star: a) showed the world he was human and fallible, b) proved he does not discriminate when it comes to sex partners, c) demonstrated he has a very active libido, and d) received tens of millions of dol-

lars worth of publicity for his meager investment. I would immediately put him in an infomercial, hawking his unique, low-cost system of self-promotion. He should then do a few weeks of community service work with Mother Teresa and televise his wedding ceremony with Elizabeth Hurley, in which he pledges fidelity and then saves President Clinton's life.

► **Charles Manson:** Okay, first off, the swastika on the forehead has got to go. Or at least cover it with bangs. Then, after a short, conservative haircut and a three-piece, pinstriped suit, I would put him on a jet, set it on automatic pilot, and program it to crash into the side of a cliff at 650 miles per hour. Naturally, Manson would perish, but after racking my brain, it's the only conceivable way I see to get him guaranteed publicity and a smidgen of sympathy. The cliff could be named Charlie's Rock, and would become both a shrine and a warning to mentally unbalanced people throughout the world.

► **Mike Tyson:** Once Mike regains the heavyweight championship, he could do no better than to immediately move into a monastery, forsaking women forever, to serve the Lord. Not only would this do wonders for his image, but women throughout the country would sleep better knowing Mike was safely tucked away in Monk Land. Every few months or so, Mike could participate in a charity boxing match, in which he would be challenged for the title by one of his fellow monks. Eventually, he would inadvertently kill one of the monks in the ring, end up back in jail, and write a best-selling book on the bad luck that's plagued him since Don King put the voodoo hair curse on him.

► **Jeffrey Dahmer:** Working with a dead client poses a unique set of problems and challenges for the professional publicist, and yet the deceased also offer their own special opportunities, as well. There are several ways to go here. I might have Hal Holbrook tour the country with a moving, heart-(and head)-rending version of "An Evening With Jeffrey Dahmer." For the younger generation, Las Vegas's Hard Rock Cafe could feature "Dahmermania: Not Jeffrey, But An Incredible Simulation."

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