

BILL COSBY Biography

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Bill Cosby is, by any standards, one of the most influential stars in America today. Whether it be through concert appearances or recordings, television or films, commercials or education, Bill Cosby has the ability to touch people's lives. His humor often centers on the basic cornerstones of our existence, seeking to provide an insight into our roles as parents, children, family members, and men and women. Without resorting to gimmickry or lowbrow humor, Bill Cosby's comedy has a point of reference and respect for the trappings and traditions of the great American humorists such as Mark Twain, Buster Keaton and Jonathan Winters.

The 1984-92 run of *The Cosby Show* and his books Fatherhood and Time Flies established new benchmarks on how success is measured. His status at the top of the TVQ survey year after year continues to confirm his appeal as one of the most popular personalities in America. His lifelong contributions to American culture were recognized with a Kennedy Center Honor in 1998 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in July 2002, America's highest civilian honor.

Cosby is the 2009 recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor and Major League Baseball's Beacon of Hope Award for his civil rights work.

The Cosby Show - The 25th Anniversary Commemorative Edition, released by First Look Studios and Carsey-Werner, available in stores or online at www.billcosby.com. The DVD box set of the NBC television hit series is the complete collection of one of the

most popular programs in the history of television, garnering 29 Emmy® nominations with six wins, six Golden Globe® nominations with three wins and ten People's Choice Awards.

"The Cosby Show is a message for all time: the family and raising your children matters most," said Bill Cosby. "Many people approach me and say that the show made them aware that there could be a better life out there for them. At the same time they say that the show still makes them laugh."

The box set also includes an exclusive, all-new, never-before-seen interview with Bill Cosby, a 25th anniversary hard cover commemorative book, a tribute photo and personal letter from Bill Cosby, a photo gallery slide show, an interview with director Jay Sandrich, a blooper reel and "A Look Back Special." Also, as an added bonus, with each purchase, fans can redeem two free music downloads and Cosby ringtones.

Come On, People! On the Path from Victims to Victors, written by Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and civil rights veteran, lay out their message of hope and empowerment in this *New York Times* best seller. *Come On, People*, published by Thomas Nelson, provides real-life examples of the problems plaguing communities throughout America and the time-tested solutions that can help turn things around. The audiobook is available online at www.billcosby.com and read by accomplished actress CCH Pounder, currently in the critically acclaimed FX series, *The Shield*.

Bill Cosby Presents The Cosnarati: State of Emergency, this rap album was made as a companion to *Come On, People!* All song story concepts are by Cosby and was assembled by his longtime musical collaborator Bill "Spaceman" Patterson with guest rappers providing the rhymes about the value of an education, respecting one's self and ... giving (listeners) a chance to raise their self-esteem and confidence. Sold exclusively online at www.billcosby.com.

Cosby has touched the hearts of a new generation of young children with his Emmy Award winning *Little Bill* animated series, which aired daily on Nickelodeon

and Saturday mornings on CBS. The show was based on Cosby's popular children's books. His interest in young people also spawned his best-selling book, Congratulations! Now What?, published by Hyperion. The book contains his amusing yet wise take on college life and what lies ahead for the new graduate in the real world.

Friends of a Feather: One of Life's Little Fables, a HarperEntertainment book released in 2003, is a collaboration with his daughter, Erika, who did the Illustrations. It is a beautiful story that explores the theme of being true to yourself.

I Am What I Ate ... and I'm frightened!!!, published by HarperCollins was released on September 21, 2004, was also on the *New York Times* Best Seller List. It offers a hip, humorous, hard-earned wisdom on the healthy lifestyle and the behavior behind it.

Fatherhood was launched appropriately enough on Father's Day as an animated series on *Nick at Nite*.

Bill and Camille Cosby produced a live action/animated Fat Albert motion picture in 2004. The movie introduced a new generation to the loveable character and his friends initially famous through the unforgettable Cosby comedy routines about them. The Fat Albert television show and feature now available on DVD.

Cosby's initial immediate success began with *Bill Cosby Is A Very Funny Fellow, Right?* and continued with many other comedy albums. He also has released a number of jazz recordings, including *hello, friend: to ennis with love* (released in 1997). Cosby has earned five Grammy Awards for best comedy album.

Bill Cosby represents the voice of a vast, ordinary world. Everyone seems to easily identify with his characters and the situations they find themselves in. He gives the twist of the ridiculous to everyday faults, foibles and successes and makes them a recognizable slice of life. Bill Cosby points out the humor in our lives, and in doing so, he touches our hearts. Because of this, his appeal is not restricted to any specific group. His qualities have endeared him to people from all walks of life.

It is the fusion of these qualities that has resulted in television's biggest and most influential hit of the modern era, *The Cosby Show*. The show was credited by many for single-handedly resurrecting the sitcom genre. Cosby's return to television after eight years was prompted by what he perceived as a lack of relevance and an abundance of superficiality in TV comedy programming. Week after week of #1 ratings and the almost unanimous critical acclaim only confirms that others agree with his opinion. In June 1985, *Life Magazine* wrote:

"Cosby's success may have changed the game as well as the scores.

Before his show hit the air, many viewers had rejected prime time television as an electronic wasteland of crime, slime, glitz and glands...What Cosby offered instead was a gentle, whimsical, warm-hearted sitcom about family life that found humor in the little things that happen in every home and everlasting value in the love and trust that exist between parents and children...Nobody actually says this family represents the whole human family, but the delicious ordinariness of its pleasures and tribulations has given millions a fresh, laughter-splashed perspective on their own domestic lives."

His success on television, which had been a catalyst in promoting NBC to first place, has been matched in other areas. In 1986 he broke Radio City's 53-year-old attendance record for his concert appearance. In 1987 wife Camille Cosby produced a home video cassette called *Bill Cosby: 49* which was distributed by Kodak and sold in the hundreds of thousands. A comedy album on Geffen Records, *Those of You With or Without Children, You'll Understand*, sold close to a million copies.

In the publishing world, Bill Cosby has shattered records with each of his books.

Fatherhood, published by Doubleday/Dolphin in May of 1986. It remained for over half of its fifty-four weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller List at #1. It has sold 2.6 million hardcover copies and 1.5 million paperbacks (published by Berkeley). The audiobook is also available online at www.billcosby.com and read by Malcolm-Jamal Warner, accomplished television and stage actor, best known as Theo Huxtable.

His next Doubleday/Dolphin title, Time Flies, had a first printing of 1.75 million copies in 1987. Like its predecessor, it too remained at the top of the *New York Times* list.

Love and Marriage, was published by Doubleday/Dolphin in April of 1989 and

covered everything from childhood romances and adolescent crushes to first love, dating and courtship, the ebb and flow of relationships and the rewards of marriage.

Childhood (published by Putnam in 1991), deals with the predicaments of growing up and coming of age, combining stories of his legendary childhood with comic insights about children of today.

Exercising his deep concern with projecting positive images of African Americans, Cosby together with partners Tom Werner and Marcy Carsey, produced *A Different World* on NBC from 1987-1993. In his partnership, they also put on the air *Here and Now* (starring Malcolm-Jamal Warner) for NBC from 1992-1993 and in 1992 the revival of the classic Groucho Marx show, *You Bet Your Life*, for first run syndication. They re-teamed again with the CBS sitcom *Cosby*, which ran from 1996-2000.

At one point in the 1999-2000 television season, Cosby had three series running simultaneously – *Cosby*, *Kids Say the Darndest Things* (1996-2000) and Nickelodeon's *Little Bill*. Cosby's other television credits during the last decade included *The Cosby Mysteries*, a series on NBC, broadcast during the 1994-5 season, and the CBS television movie *I Spy Returns*, co-starring his original partner Robert Culp.

With over thirty years in comedy, Bill Cosby is for many young comedians the man who wrote the textbook. What Cosby teaches is to approach the monologue as a screenwriter looks at real life, bringing to each story the structure and body of a complete work. The Cosby student will also learn that one does not have to use offensive language or risqué topics to obtain laughs. According to Cosby, "Anyone should be able to say on stage what they want. But those who have knowledge, do understand that certain things on stage can be abused and misused. And if such topics are used just for laughter, the humor will not stand the test of time."

Cosby is one of the best-selling comedians. Nine of Cosby's albums have been certified Gold Records and six have been certified Platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

Cosby made his motion picture debut in a powerful and dramatic role in the film *Man and Boy*, which was set in the post-Civil War era. He teamed with his *I Spy* partner,

Robert Culp, for *Hickey and Boggs*. Cosby has co-starred with Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte in *Uptown Saturday Night* and in the sequel *Let's Do It Again*. Cosby joined Raquel Welch in *Mother, Jugs and Speed*. He also starred in an animated film, *Aesop's Fables*. Cosby and Sidney Poitier rejoined to co-star in their third film together, *A Piece of the Action*. He then teamed with Richard Pryor in a starring role in *California Suite*.

It was during Cosby's nightclub circuit period (when he was first getting started) that Carl Reiner caught his act in Pittsburgh and introduced Cosby to producer Sheldon Leonard, who signed him to star in the *I Spy* series. The series, about two spies disguised as tennis bums, was an instant smash hit on TV. Cosby's *I Spy* role as co-star broke the racial barrier of a dramatic television series. Before the series ended, he had won three Emmy Awards. It was a historic moment in casting when a black man was placed along side a white man as his equal and it created international interest in the show and in Bill Cosby. After *I Spy*, *The Bill Cosby Show* followed on NBC in 1969. In September 1976 Cosby hosted another variety show called *Cos*, this time on ABC.

In addition, Cosby has filmed numerous television specials, starred in NBC-TV's *Children's Theater* and PBS-TV's *The Electric Company* (the latter created by the *Sesame Street* Children's Television Workshop) and has written, directed and produced two educational TV shows (*Concern*, dealing with his concern for school children and *Prejudice*, an irreverent spoof of prejudiced hang-ups). His production company also turned out two animated specials featuring his lovable gallery of childhood pals. In the early 80's, Cosby hosted *Picture Pages* on Captain Kangaroo's *Wake Up* program on CBS. Today, the instruction Cosby leads, which is designed to develop readiness skills in pre-school children, is available on home video by Disney. The series was awarded the Gold Award at the 1981 International Film & TV Festival in New York as "Outstanding Children's Program."

Someone up there touched Bill Cosby with the gift of comedy when he was born in Philadelphia on July 12, 1937, the son of William and Anna Cosby. He has two younger brothers, Robert, Russell and a third brother, James who is deceased. It didn't take Cosby long to begin making up gags and practicing routines. His appreciative

audience of one, his mom, always encouraged his inventive performances of everyday happenings.

Cosby attended Mary Channing Wister Elementary School along with his pals Fat Albert, Old Weird Harold, Dumb Donald, Rudy, Nolan and Weasel – all later immortalized by Bill Cosby's comedy routines. When school was out, they could all be found romping through the "projects" or around the Ninth Street Bridge. It was there that Cosby acquired his lifetime love of sports. Cosby's sixth grade teacher, Mary B. Forchic, sensed his genius when she wrote on his report card, "William is a boy's boy, an all-around fellow, and he should grow up to do great things."

About his high school sports career, Cosby humorously claims, "I was on the ninth grade football team which was made up of me and ten other guys from the remedial gym class. All we had to do was look at the parallel bars, and they gave us a 'D'. I never got into the game and I had to give my jersey to the guy who had ripped his."

He often neglected his studies for athletics and, after repeating the tenth grade, he left school to join the Navy. He finished high school via a correspondence course while still in the service. When he was discharged, he enrolled at Temple University with an athletic scholarship and earned academic honors. His goal was to become a physical education teacher. He probably could have made it as a professional football player, but the world is richer in laughter because he decided on show business.

To support himself during his college days, Cosby tended bar at night, where he found a ready-made audience for his brand of humor. The enthusiasm of his customers convinced him that he might have a chance as a comedian.

His first stage appearance (for \$5 a night) was at a nightclub called "The Underground" in a small room named "The Cellar." It didn't have a stage, so Cosby did his act on a table with a chair propped on it. He not only had to climb over the bar to get to the "stage," but he couldn't stand up because of his height. He was probably the world's first "sitdown" comedian.

The beatniks were “in” at that time in New York’s Greenwich Village, and word of Cosby’s comedy spread from Philly. A club called “The Gaslight” booked him for sixty dollars a week, and he was on his way.

His routines rocked audiences with laughter at the top clubs around the country. Many of his expressions became part of the jargon of this generation, like his famous drawn-out “riiiiiiiight.” He established a rare rapport with all audiences. He talked about his youth in Philadelphia where two guys on the block shared one broken-down auto, crashed parties, cowered from trouble, and constantly scrimped around to raise the 19 cents they needed for gas for their car and the 14 dollars they needed for oil.

About his performances Cosby says, “I feel that in-person contact with people is the most important thing in comedy. While I’m up on stage, I can actually put myself into the audience and adjust my pace and timing to them. I can get into their heads through their ears and through their eyes. Only through this total communication can I really achieve what I’m trying to do.”

As busy as he is with his many ventures, Cosby has been a crusader throughout his career for a better world and for better understanding between people. Besides his involvement with a host of charity organizations, Cosby is also an active trustee of his alma mater, Temple University of Philadelphia. As philanthropists, Bill and Camille Cosby have made substantial gifts in support of education (most notably to predominantly African American colleges and universities) and to various social service and civil rights organizations.

In addition, Cosby earned a Masters Degree in Education (M. Ed.) in 1972 and his Doctorate in Education (Ed. D.) in 1977 from the University of Massachusetts. His doctoral thesis was titled “The Integration of Visual Media Via Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids Into the Elementary Schools Culminating as a Teacher Aid to Achieve Increased Learning.”

Cosby’s been busy raising a family, too. He married the former Camille Hanks on January 25, 1964, while she was still a student at the University of Maryland. They

raised four daughters (Erika, Erinn, Ensa and Evin) and one son (Ennis Cosby) and now have three grandchildren. The family resides in New England.

When speaking of Camille, Cosby has urged an amendment to the saying, “Behind every good man there’s a good woman.” He suggests that “behind” should be substituted by “Three miles ahead.” Camille has not only raised five children, but has also been involved in her husband’s career. She has produced some of his albums, CDs and videos and has taped several concerts over the years. Also, she has earned her Masters and Doctoral degrees in Education from the University of Massachusetts.

Camille enjoyed great success adapting the best-selling book Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years. First she produced along with Judith Rutherford James, the property as a Broadway play and then as a television movie. The play was nominated for three Tony Awards and the television film won a Peabody Award. Camille also produced a one-hour sociological documentary film *No Dreams Deferred*, which aired on over 150 public television stations. When Oprah Winfrey debuted her new magazine in April 2000, she chose Camille Cosby as her very first interview.

On the evolution of his own style of comedy, Cosby states that he was drawn at an early age to the icons of jazz: Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and Betty Carter. Through their musical example, Cosby learned to emulate in comedy their ability to take an idea and continually find new and innovative ways of expressing the same theme.

When Cosby and his pals yelled at the top of their lungs under the Ninth Street Bridge, the echo could be heard for blocks. The legacy of Cosby’s comedic genius continues to be heard around the world.

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(11/09)