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BROADCASTING
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Executive Offices ■ P.O. Box 3003 ■ Blue Bell, PA 19422-0735
Phone: (215) 628-3500 ■ Fax: (215) 628-9269
www.crawfordbroadcasting.com

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CHARLTON HESTON

“I can part the Red Sea, but I can’t part with you.”

So said an icon, a hero’s hero. He was one of my heroes, one of the very few. Charlton Heston, the actor, the legend, the patriot, the supreme human being died April 5, 2008 after years of battling Alzheimer’s Disease. Heston was 84, and every one of those years was the year of the hero.

This man of men was born in Chicago in 1923. He was educated there, and served in the US military in the second World War, a gunner in the US Army Air Force in the old and reliable B-25 airplane. He returned to America, moved to Michigan, lived in the then Michigan wilderness before becoming an actor, one of the greatest who ever lived.

Heston, who always asked his friends to call him Chuck, was an activist, politically active in so many ways. He was an ardent supporter of John F. Kennedy and the Democrat party in the early 1960s. He believed in then liberal values as they were defined and worked for them. But as his life progressed, things changed and so did Heston and his beliefs. There came a time in his life when, he said “I exchanged a set of stone tablets for a shot gun”. He then became President of the NRA, the National Rifle Association and embraced all of the conservative philosophy which accompanied that great second amendment organization.

Earlier in his life, he had embraced the political philosophy of fellow actor Ronald Regan and supported him enthusiastically and energetically. Unsurprisingly, Heston incurred the ire of Hollywood, ultra-liberal to the core, and that point forward, especially in the NRA days, Heston was blackballed and moved to the side in Hollywood, no matter his incredible accomplishments. Chuck, the hero, was reduced to secondary parts if any at all and suffered the disdain of the Hollywood bigots.

From his story in David Thomson said this about the great Mr. Heston:

“He had the gravitas to play God and God-like figures which you don’t have among today’s actor”.

So it was. I can see him even now in his role as Michelangelo in the great movie THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY. Do see that one if you have not. No one could have

possibly played a better Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Jackson as he did. Forgive him a temporary detour in his great career as he starred in the PLANET OF THE APES, a most unforgettable film and well beneath him. Remember him for an absolutely unforgettable role in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. You should be required to see that one if you have not. Whatever the real Moses looked like, the modern day Heston was his identical twin.

President George Bush said of Heston:

“He was a man of character and integrity, with a big heart”.

True, but Heston was even much more than that. In his time, and for what he was, no one but no one was like him or equal to him. He believed fanatically in freedom. He was deeply offended by racial discrimination his entire life, and he accompanied Martin Luther King in the 1963 March on Washington for Civil Rights. Few other actors did that, but Heston did, unconcerned for his reputation or safety, so much so did he believe in the rights of all men including the discriminated-against African American. Then, and for the rest of his life, Heston always engaged as an activist in the culture wars, protesting at every turn the debasement of every day families and popular culture and energetically deriding political correctness of any kind. He was a man straight and honest.

Heston had a profound influence off-screen. Among his great civil activities, Heston was the head of a Labor Union and championed their rights against corporate America. His passion as an American was never more evident than when he became President of the NRA, and the most vocal champion of the second amendment, the right to bear arms.

With a mind so sharp, active, even brilliant and a passion to energize it, it is unbelievably disappointing, horribly cruel to think in terms of this great man dying of the crippling disease Alzheimer's. No man of his character should ever die without mental facilities, intellectual acumen as he did.

Those who attended his funeral included Nancy Regan, the living wife of one of America's greatest Presidents Ronald Regan, Tom Selleck, one great actor, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Oliva de Havilland, Keith Carradine and Pat Boone. Known conservatives shun by Hollywood, even liberals like Oliver Stone and Rob Reiner attended to pay their respects to this great man, a beautiful act of human kindness.

Charlton Heston is survived by his wife Lydia whom he courted most aggressively while gunning for the United States Air Force in the second World War. She wanted to wait, he did not. He convinced her to marry him with the most persuasive argument that if he were to die in the war, she would be the beneficiary of a \$10,000 life insurance policy. Their marriage lasted from then, till the day he died. How rare is that in Hollywood.

Chuck, it seems almost disrespectful to call him that, was not only an icon, actor extraordinaire, patriot and political activist but a husband and father of the greatest

commitment, integrity and love. The daughter and son of his loins remember him not only with love but with the deepest respect.

How interesting it is that when Heston ceased playing heroes, Hollywood replaced all such movies with anti-heroes with movies such as THE GRADUATE and BUTCH CASSIDY. Whatever the effect of such movies, America was far better off with the Heston type. Politically, a Democrat all of his life until his later years, Heston said of that party:

“The Democratic slid to the left right out from under me”.

There was for him no choice but to become Republican and Conservative. He was both as good as any man could be. When he died, the liberal leaning Los Angeles Times said of him:

“Charlton Heston dies! Hollywood’s GOP (Republicans) population plummets by 25%!”

There are indeed precious few Republicans in Hollywood but Heston was certainly the first and best.

He made, this great man did, over 100 films. President George W. Bush awarded Mr. Heston the PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM during a 2003 ceremony at the White House. No one deserved it more. No one. He was a champion of the American dream and American values.

Nothing will define Charlton Heston like the movie BEN-HUR. Charlton Heston played the role of Judah Ben-Hur, an absolutely magnetic Jewish noble man and merchant at the time of Christ. The movie is stirring, unforgettable, dramatic and dynamic as entertainment, as history and most importantly as spiritual. It is the most profound and impactful movie I have ever seen. Heston as Ben-Hur is mesmerizing, enchanting, enthralling an ICON AND HERO at work. Ben-Hur through Heston, and a testimony of that man and that great movie, has been part of my life since I first saw the movie decades ago. I watch it several times every year, always learning and enjoying something new, and always thanking in a silent way Heston for something extraordinary, lasting, eternal.

I met him once at a Denver airport, and unlike me, I was speechless. I had the opportunity to sit with him for almost one hour in that airport and watch a football game and talk. He was a man beyond gracious, human, interesting and interested, commanding, intense, but unbelievably real and sincere. I shall never forget that, one of the finest one hours of my life. I hope in some way my life may have been like his, in any small way. He was special beyond words, and shame on Hollywood and any who would demean his life, character and memory. He deserves and has earned the adulation and respect of every American.

So, this great man is gone, cremated which bothers me, because something of him should remain even in death. No matter, nothing can destroy, cremate his memory and his accomplishments. Not for me, and not for millions the world over. Thank you Judah Ben-Hur, Moses, Michelangelo, thank you for the impact and the influence you have had in the lives of people everywhere and for the highest possible values. Thank you, eternally, you great man.

YOU ARE MY HERO!