

Television Believed to Be Worst Offender In Savagery as Form of Entertainment

The Worship of Violence

In our churches we give worship to the Prince of Peace. We pay homage in our hearts to gentleness and compassion. We believe in healing the sick, caring for the destitute, comforting the distraught. Yet in our entertainment we are enthralled at every form of savagery, brutality, killing, maiming and blood-letting.

And we are raising a generation who do a pretty good job of imitating this in our neighborhood streets.

Television is undoubtedly the worst offender. It brings into our living rooms a nightly torrent of violence which makes many of us recoil, some of us turn off the sets, and some wonder how the youngsters can sit there and take it.

I'll never forget one mother's classic remark, "Now Pauly you turn off that television and go to bed. You've seen six murders already and that's enough for one night!"

A recent witness before the Federal Commission testified that our average youngster sees "the violent destruction of 13,000 human beings on TV" during his growing-up years of 5 to 14.

TV, which is so circumspect in avoiding controversial content in its dramas, has virtually a no-holds-barred policy when it comes to brutality.

There's no limit on violence. Actor John Cassavetes recently complained, "You can get approval on a story in which a woman is slaughtered, but an honest story—that's another matter."

The stage was well set by the comic books when TV came along. Torture, mayhem, and sadism were virtually unrestrained in the comic books until outraged parents and the law forced that industry to clean itself up—a little. The paperback books and low-budget movies have inherited some of the violence market, but TV is by far top dog.

What harm does it do? It infuses a worship of violence into our culture. It makes brutality glamorous. It sets up as heroes men who are adept at smashing bones and faces, who are quick to kill. These become the patterns of heroism. This is what youngsters are invited to emulate.

We have always had symbols of manliness. A red-blooded man is supposed to be able to use his dukes, if need be, to defend himself. Sometimes that time-honored gesture, the punch in the nose, may be a fitting reply to an insult to one's wife or one's honor. We have always had a certain threshold of violence, a point up to which we excuse it.

A Bestial Pattern But when that threshold is raised to include wanton punching and mauling, incessant beating, slamming, stabbing, impaling, burning, crushing, stomping, and choking—then we no longer have

New Frontiers In Living

by Howard Whitman

an excusable human pattern but a bestial one. Instead of "punch him in the nose," the emotional cry within becomes, "gun him down, kill him—kill, kill."

In a New York drive a few years ago to rid the city of sadistic publications, Mayor Robert Wagner held such popularized violence partly responsible for the grotesque trends in youth crime.

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then Corporation Counsel, cited a series of youth "delinquencies"—stomping a man to death, burning a girl with cigar butts, flogging girls with whips, torturing and beating homeless men—and declared, "You'd think those kids were using these books for a script."

To impressionable youngsters of borderline intelligence, with unbalanced emotions, the constant stimulation to violence may sooner or later erupt into action. It can no longer be brushed aside as "getting the aggressions out," as the apologists for violence once contended. Instead, as J. Edgar Hoover has put it, we are "creating criminals faster than jails can be built."

Liked to Beat People

The borderline youngster does not passively watch incessant violence and come away cleansed. He is incited, stimulated, his sense of values warped.

And so one 18-year-old who tortured an aged man with lighted cigarettes and beat him into unconsciousness told the police, "I like to beat people up. I like to see them squirm and suffer."

And another, a boy of 17 involved in a number of beatings and muggings, said, "I used the victims for punching bags. I wanted to see how hard I could hit."

The police are not shocked by this anymore. They've heard an 18-year-old who killed a woman by crushing and strangling her confess, "I like to hear people scream. I like to beat—and break ribs." And they've heard a 16-year-old in a gang stabbing say, "I wanted to know what it felt like to stick a knife through bone." That's just about made them shockproof.

For No Reason

The police use a new phrase these days: the "no-reason assault." It describes violence without a motive. Just violence for its own sake: The boys in Los Angeles who "just wanted to beat somebody up." The youngsters in Washington who killed a man they didn't even know—"We were out to shoot the first guy who came along."

Why? I've asked the question scores of times to the youngsters themselves, in police stations, in detention homes, in jail cells. The most honest answer I received was from a 17-year-old in San Francisco, standing trial with five others for beating up an innocent man.

"I guess a kid wants to make a name for himself," he said. That's what it meant to him. Turn on your TV. Heroes are men who can slug. They're skull-breakers and bone-crushers. They snuff out lives with-

violence. With the help of parents, school, and church—and with their own built-in moral fiber—they learn to manage aggressive energies, to apply them for good and not evil.

But even for the good kids, look what values are exalted by the violence peddlers. Manliness is identified with the quick trigger, the fast and deadly fist.

Violence is portrayed as a

first, rather than a last resort. Reason doesn't enter the picture at all.

Perhaps worst of all, the vogue of violence preaches a message of taking the law into one's own hands. If someone has wronged a member of our family, "gun 'im down." Vengeance justifies everything. Be your own judge, jury and executioner.

This is poor schooling for youth in an age when man must be at his most civilized if he is to survive.

The new frontier is in developing a generation which is sensitive to human suffering, not callous. The delicate balance between humanity's survival or suicide may be the new generation's devotion to human values rather than its surrender to the code of killing.

American prestige suffered

greatly in Europe in the 1930s when the U.S. was famed for its gangsters and "Little Caesar" was its trademark.

Shall today's trademark be "Mike Hammer"? The free world is against violence among nations. It should also be against violence among men.

Tomorrow—What's Happened To Integrity? (Distributed by The Register and Tribune Syndicate)

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