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We must regulate against excessive violence

4/28/99

Studies have apparently shown the average American child watches four hours of television every day. By the time average children enter junior high, they will have witnessed approximately 8,000 acts of violence on TV.

Is it any surprise that children act out what they see? Many human behaviors are learned by imitation.

We ought to be embarrassed by the type of television programming and computer games we as a society present to our children. Have you seen The Jerry Springer Show or pro wrestling or played Mortal Kombat -- which is tame compared with newer products -- lately? Take some time one day and watch teen-agers' favorite shows. Some programs are fine, but shows and video games such as those mentioned above cater to the belief that emotions, because they are powerful, represent the truth of a situation. If fear, lust, anger or hatred is present in these shows, we instinctively think, "Something real is going on."

Rather than encourage compassion for others or independent thinking, these shows simulate the primal passions that are part of human nature.

Why?

Because producers of these shows make millions of dollars, and we as a society allow commercial culture to guide our children's development.

While hiking in Yosemite, I once happened to meet the executive producer of the "Halloween" movie series. I asked him how could he possibly feel good about making such trashy movies, that only shock and horrify impressionable teens? He said, "Oh, that's simple. Money!" He said he and his wife actually laughed at all the people who lined up to see the sequels to their movies. Think of that: The producer laughs at the people "enjoying" his product -- a macabre world of horrific violence. He laughs all the way to the bank.

Television, movies, and especially interactive computer simulations are

extremely potent influences on our imagination. We remember shocking scenes from these media in our subconscious, and such images become part of our mental landscape.

Is it right to pour trash into the minds of our youth, for the sake of commercial profits?

Effective parents can guide and shield their own children, but what about other people's children? Don't they deserve to grow up in a healthy society with sane media influence?

How many people must die before we regulate the media against excessive violence?

Kim Miller

Goleta

Please, not so much skunk in that elephant soup

To paraphrase Mark Twain, rumors of my notoriety are greatly exaggerated.

A recent News-Press story about my research in the Amazon Basin among the Yanomamo Indians gave the impression that I am more notorious than I really am and that most of the members of my profession are hostile to or critical of my research and publications and that I hold them in contempt. Not so.

I used a metaphor to try to put the nature of academic things into perspective: a soup comprised of one elephant and one skunk. The vast majority of my professional colleagues regard my work with esteem -- the elephant part of the soup -- but silently ignore unreasonable criticism of my research because it falls outside the realm of academic propriety. These are colleagues who assign one of my books on the Yanomamo to their students as required reading. But, a highly vocal minority persists in denigrating me and my research in non-academic ways for a variety of reasons, most notably professional jealousy.

These represent the acrid flavor that a skunk, even in a very large elephant soup, imparts to it.

All academics have critics and I relish the public exchanges and debates I have with professionally responsible critics. This kind of debate and criticism is healthy and improves science and research. But, there is no room in science for politically or personally motivated attacks and deliberate attempts to prevent another colleague from continuing his or her research -- to kill the messenger because the message is disagreeable.

Most of the hysterical critics of my research seem to believe that they will loom larger in the profession if they can make me look shorter or smaller by preventing me from returning to continue my field research among the Yanomamo. For them, that's cheaper in time, effort and skill than doing better or more significant research that will truly challenge my empirical findings and scientific interpretations.

On my last three -- and personally costly -- attempts to return to the Yanomamo in both Brazil and Venezuela, local newspapers carried highly inflammatory accusations against me the day after I arrived. The content of these stories was furnished by my apparently highly-organized critics with the clear intent of pressuring local officials to either deny or rescind my research permit to go into the Yanomamo area. That's a major reason why I'm weary of being an anthropologist... and the basic substance of your recent story.

|Napoleon A. Chagnon

Department of Anthropology

UCSB

Smart weapons, stupid people, old story

It seems once again that the human race is accelerating into the folly of trying to prove that you can bomb people and prove once and for all that killing is wrong. Even more disturbing is the recent creation of so called "smart weapons" which supposedly only destroy military weapons and personnel and leave the civilian population to go about its business.

However, according to the United Nations, over one million Iraqi civilians have died since the Gulf War as a result of collateral damage to its water treatment plants, sewage disposal, food production, and medical care facilities.

Now we are engaged in a great war in the Balkans to prove once and for all that ethnic hatred is wrong. We have taken sides in a civil war that has been going on since the middle ages. This operation has the word "debacle" written all over it. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise to any of us. After all, this century has seen countless wars which have killed over two hundred million people. The only thing that has changed is now you can kill millions with the push of a button.

I guess that as the human race enters the new millennium, we have not really learned anything at all, even with all these smart weapons.

John Lacelle

Goleta

We've changed, why can't others?

I have some questions about how sovereignty is established in the real practical world. From my reading and study of world history defined boundaries seem to change like the changes in the wind. What was thought to be established and permanent one day is swept away the next. More often than not change has been driven by the Four Horse Men of the Apocalypse -- plague, pestilence, famine and war -- personal greed and some form of manifest destiny.

Our own national history is a checkered collection of motives. Simply stated we are in no position to proselytize virtue to the world. I believe we need a discussion of what sovereignty means and how it is established if we are to effect any real change in the affairs of other nations. Far too little of our own history could pass the test some would like to pass on other nations.

We need to separate wishful thinking from the practical world where people live. Esoteric debate is nice but people live with their limitations to visualize change. There are those who somehow think our nation was blessed by God and therefore we are acting in his behalf but any close examination will question that belief.

Our nation has changed its boundaries in the past. There is no guarantee our present boundaries will last into the future. If we can not justify our own sovereignty from a historical sense how can we define sovereignty for others?

Richard E. Williams

Solvang

Current benefit

criteria unfair

Whether you spent your career in government or private industry is the determining factor whether you obtain full or reduced Social Security benefits at retirement.

I worked for the government for 31 years and contributed 7.5 percent of income to subsidize my government pension. I also worked 17 years in private industry and contributed another 7.65 percent of income toward the Social Security retirement fund.

Our congressional representatives changed the rules in midstream two months before I retired in 1987 and passed a Windfall Elimination Provision that reduced my Social Security benefits by 60 percent because I am only receiving a government pension. Private industry retirees are not affected by this provision.

How can Congress make this distinction between those two individuals when both equally contributed to the Social Security fund and both earned the minimum 40 credits necessary to obtain benefits.

Only by writing your elected officials can we be heard.

Gil Kazmerzak

Goleta

A tragic case

of juxtaposition

What a tragic juxtaposition! The same day the News-Press prints the remarkably insightful and well-written letter criticizing the tail-wagging-the-dog use of achievement tests -- this young man belongs in the school superintendent's office or the Graduate School of Education at

UCSB -- we have the appalling murder of students by other students in Littleton, Colorado.

As a society we have become enamoured with test scores as quick and easy solutions to complex educational problems. And in the process we have neglected the basic human issues in teaching and learning. Littleton is one probable consequence. I hope that our educational and political leaders, local and statewide, and all of us, will take very seriously the important issues this young man articulates.

George I. Brown

Santa Barbara

LETTER OF THE DAY / LEONARD OSBORNE

We won't see 1984 in 2000

Waiting for Y2K is about as thrilling as waiting for the odometer on a new car to turn 2,000. We are wondering when the free services will stop, and we worry about being in trouble with a car falling apart.

Y2K represents a centralizing of information that has not been equalled since Hitler's day, and we don't know who is in charge this time.

Apparently 2,700 newspapers and 800 TV stations are linked to the internet, but there are 5 billion people in the world who are not using computers.

I am typing this the old-fashioned way, and I am part of the older set that knows how expensive information can get.

I trust that those who joke about Y2K will note that the number line called our "date line" is really a number line, and "zero" is merely a point, and not a year that would add up to two years, the time between 1 B.

C. and 1 A.

D.

When Hitler was talking, he liked to say his rule would last a thousand years, or until 3000 A.

D. We might look at all the celebrating for the millennium, and be sure that we are not working toward a "Dr. Strangelove" future. We should look at 2000 A.

D. as something that is quite like an odometer reading and plan for ways to avoid a "new Holocaust."

The internet is functioning as a gate keeper that is stopping individual thought in the name of being famous. Those who are "netparents" should let this letter through, because if they don't, we can really fear another Hilter-ish operation.

Years ago, I read a book about computers that expected their future to max out at 15 percent of the population, those who make, service, and live with the machine.

Rather than risking a "Hal" -- that was in another movie, "2001: A Space Odyssey" -- we should note that the end of that movie. "Growing old in your room," can be done with or without computers, and it is still the human body that is growing old.

My point is that we can celebrate 2000 like it is, only the beginning of a 1000 year millennium, and not sweat and toil about how to fill the year 2525. "If man is still alive, if woman can survive," as the 1969 song went.

Think young.

Leonard L. Osborne lives in Santa Barbara.