

America's violence epidemic: police state in the making

by Marianna Wertz

When the Gulf war broke out last August, my husband, who is incarcerated in a federal prison because of the political beliefs he shares with Lyndon LaRouche, commented that the only difference for the prisoners is that the violence on the screen is real. All during the war, commentary repeatedly pointed to the "problem," that American viewers, so conditioned to violence on the TV and movie screens, were simply viewing the war as a natural extension of their favorite pastime, and therefore, cheering for the "good guys." As one astute commentator put it, "The war's major casualty was America's conscience."

Now the American Medical Association has declared that America's infatuation with violence "is a public health crisis of epidemic proportions, every bit as pervasive, virulent, and destructive as the AIDS epidemic." This statement, by Robert McAfee, M.D., vice chairman of the AMA Board of Trustees, was reported in the March 4 issue of *American Medical News*.

McAfee cites some compelling statistics.

- A recent AMA survey found that 30% of Americans said someone they knew had suffered the effects of violence in the last 12 months.

- The homicide rate for black men ages 15 to 24 has risen 40% since 1984.

- Battering is responsible for more injuries than car crashes, rape, and muggings combined, according to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control.

One could add the fact that the number of 14- to 17-year-olds who were arrested in 1990 was 30 times what it was in 1950. And the fact that the U.S. prison system now contains over 1 million Americans.

Recent examples

For *EIR* readers who may deliberately avoid media violence, and therefore remain in blissful ignorance about what is flooding our airwaves, let me describe a few of the latest hits. (My source on this is the *Washington Post* "Weekend" magazine of March 22.)

First, there's *The Silence of the Lambs*, which, according to Gannett News Service, "ranks with *Psycho* and *Alien* among the scariest movies ever made." The movie begins when, "on the track of a carver-killer nicknamed 'Buffalo Bill,' fledgling FBI agent Jodie Foster solicits insight from

brilliant psycho-psychiatrist Anthony Hopkins, who's in a maximum security prison for acts of cannibalism."

Then there's *New Jack City*. "It's about a lethally enterprising street gang that builds a brutal multimillion-dollar crack empire in Harlem. The gang's power becomes so awesome that undercover cops Ice-T and Judd Nelson . . . lead an unofficial special team to take appropriately powerful, state-of-the-art measures."

Finally, there's *The Hard Way*, which is about "a hard-nosed cop on the trail of a hiply psychotic serial killer and the baby-faced film idol who wants to 'get serious' by imitating him."

Media critics, uncomfortable with the unbelievable level of mayhem which is regularly portrayed on the screen, offer various reasons for it. The establishment's own *New York Times* recently ran a feature by movie critic John J. O'Connor, titled "A Rogues' Gallery of Sociopaths," which began with the two-word paragraph, "Sociopaths sell." O'Connor excuses the February spate of serial-murder and psychopathic killing specials that graced America's TV screens as the result of the "sweeps" period—the few weeks that determine stations' advertising rates. He called it the "Triumph of the Id."

New York Times Arts & Leisure reviewer Caryn James concludes, in her March 10 column, "The psychos and loonies of today are perfectly cast for an age inured to intense violence." This jaded view leads Ms. James to hail *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, in which cannibalism, sodomy, necrophilia, and mutilation are vividly and repeatedly portrayed, as "brilliant."

On the opposing side, PBS film critic Michael Medved, who eloquently denounces media violence as anti-family and a rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic, concludes that the only solution to the violence epidemic is "application of free market principles and displays of private-sector determination and resourcefulness. . . ."

Is this not just a bit of "the hair of the dog that bit you?"

The lesson of the Roman Empire

The question that nobody seems willing to ask is, who is benefiting by turning the American people into violence-crazed sociopaths?

To answer this question, we can look to history, where

many times before oligarchical elites have attempted to control populations through the use of *organized violence*. The Roman Empire was the master in conditioning the masses with “bread and circuses,” while conducting genocidal wars against the enemies of the Empire.

The great Christian theologian St. Augustine, who recounts his own climb out of the cesspit of cults and crime of the fourth-century Roman Empire in his *Confessions*, includes a vivid account of the impact that the gladiator shows—organized violence—had on the youth of his day. As he recounts, even his good friend Alypius, who ultimately joined Augustine in converting to Christianity, could not resist the lure of the blood-lust.

“At first he detested these displays and refused to attend them. But one day during the season for this cruel and blood-thirsty sport he happened to meet some friends and fellow-students returning from their dinner. In a friendly way they brushed aside his resistance and his stubborn protests and carried him off to the arena.

“‘You may drag me there bodily,’ he protested, ‘but do you imagine that you can make me watch the show and give my mind to it? I shall be there, but it will be just as if I were not present, and I shall prove myself stronger than you or the games.’

“He did not manage to deter them by what he said, and perhaps the very reason why they took him with them was to discover whether he would be as good as his word. When they arrived at the arena, the place was seething with the lust for cruelty. They found seats as best they could and Alypius shut his eyes tightly, determined to have nothing to do with these atrocities. If only he had closed his ears as well! For an incident in the fight drew a great roar from the crowd, and this thrilled him so deeply that he could not contain his curiosity. Whatever had caused the uproar, he was confident that, if he saw it, he would find it repulsive and remain master of himself. So he opened his eyes, and his soul was stabbed with a wound more deadly than any which the gladiator, whom he was so anxious to see, had received in his body. He fell, and fell more pitifully than the man whose fall had drawn that roar of excitement from the crowd. The din had pierced his ears and forced him to open his eyes, laying his soul open to receive the wound which struck it down.”

Justifying state-run lawlessness

A clue to unraveling the answer to the question—who benefits from this purposeful spread of violence in the media?—is the recurring theme of current box office hits, cable television, and regular programming, as with two of the above examples: justified lawlessness by the police. Movie after movie now depicts a situation where police officers resort to murdering their suspects, often when these suspects are either handcuffed or disarmed. The justification, whether stated explicitly or merely hinted at, is that these criminals *deserved to die* and, given the laxity of the courts, would



eventually go free if allowed to live.

In order to understand how this works, the reader should put himself in the place of a would-be tyrant and try to imagine what he would do if he really wanted to impose a police state on this nation. Wouldn't it be easiest if the American people were to *demand* a police state, for their own protection?

Those who deliberately promote violence in the media know, as Augustine did, that violence, like any sinful activity, conditions those who partake, to accept it, indeed to crave it. In the resulting general climate of violence, in which honest citizens fear for their lives, the non-violent majority will inevitably begin to demand increased police-state measures for their own protection.

The same people who cheer for the cop who kills the psychopath to keep society free of crime, also cheered “our boys,” when they bombed Iraq back to the Stone Age, to keep the world safe for democracy. Even the dope pushers, bank robbers, and arsonists in my husband's prison cheered for the GIs.

The Gulf war was a case study for the Bush imperialists, bent on imposing a police state on this nation, in order to maintain their control in an escalating economic collapse. They tested whether the American people's conditioning to violence could be carried over to support for *real* state-run violence against an “upstart” nation. Unfortunately, they found the answer to be a resounding yes.