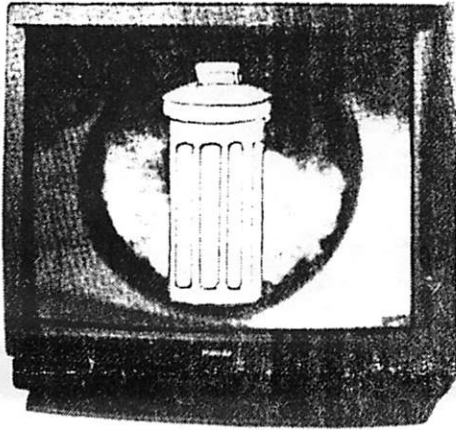


AMERICA FED ON TRASH TV

by Haven Gow



U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno recently testified before members of the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee and encouraged the senators to legislate against TV violence if the television industry will not take the initiative and curb dramatized violence and bloodshed.

A front-page story in the November 7, 1993 National Catholic Register pointed out that "For more than two decades, the television industry has made many promises to clean up the airwaves and reduce violence on television. But little happened. Now's there a backlash. With more than 80 percent of the American people saying television violence directly harms society, according to a Times-Mirror survey, curbing programming has suddenly become a no-lose issue for everyone on Capitol Hill."

The Debate of Responsibility

Still, others insist that TV is not to blame for the increases in violence in America, and that curbing TV sex and violence will not reduce anti-social thinking and behavior of young persons.

For example, Edward Morris, chairman of the TV department of Columbia College in Chicago, states: "Television is a convenient target...But the idea of making the television industry the scapegoat for the failure of the public to take charge of its children, its homes and its Congress is ridiculous." Chuck Stone, a columnist/social critic, observes: "Television cannot be absolved of blame for America's violence. But neither is it solely responsible for the violent disintegration of America's civility." Mr. Stone contends that efforts to

at RT
curb TV sex and violence really amount to censorship and an attack on the First Amendment right to freedom of speech and expression.

On the other hand, Dr. Monte Liebman, a psychiatrist in Brown Deer, Wisconsin, says the entertainment industry cannot avoid moral responsibility for its role in making the United States an increasingly violent society; he is especially concerned about the impact that TV programs saturated with sex, violence and anti-religious hostility can and do have on emotionally and morally immature young people, whose parents are out of the home and use TV as a baby-sitter.

If TV can Sell Products, Why not Sex and Violence?

Robert Stuart, chairman emeritus of the National Can Corp. in Chicago and past president of the Chicago Crime Commission, says that, after studying much research on the topic, he sees a definite link between TV violence and violence in real life; he notes that TV people claim advertising on TV can help companies sell their products but then deny that TV sex and violence can have any effect on the minds and conduct of people.

Dr. G.H. Wang, president of an educational foundation in Chicago, declares: "The TV industry should have better balance in what they present to the public; it's true that violence is a fact of life in America, but TV people can present a better balance by showing good people in society who are helping rather than hurting people."

Joseph W. Gow, a devoted and loving father in Arlington Heights, Ill., observes: "TV programs saturated with sex and violence can insidiously plant harmful ideas into the minds of the viewers. When people are faced with certain problems or situations, they can be inspired to act out what is latent or repressed in their minds. When they are faced with a crisis, they can be instigated to imitate what they have seen on TV and act out a violent rather than peaceful solution to the crisis."

Mrs. Mary LaMantia, director of the lunch program at St. Therese Catholic Elementary School, Chinatown, Chicago, states: "One time I was over a friend's house, and she had on cable TV. The program was filled with explicit sexual activity. I would never want to have my grandchildren and great-grandchildren come to my home and see such programs on my TV. I would be ashamed of myself. Also, TV talk shows are becoming more nasty, dirty and explicitly sexual. One time I was watching a talk show, and there were two sisters who said they had sex with the same man. On another show, a mother was bragging about having

Chinese Family Voice
450 Taraval Street, # 246
San Francisco, Calif 94116

CFA VOICE Summer 94

sex with her daughter's boyfriend. Somebody has opened up a Pandora's box, and now we are seeing all the evils coming out of the closet."

Intolerant of Moral Judgment

In this connection, Dr. Helen Sterk, a professor of communications at Marquette University, has done a study of popular TV talk shows such as the "Oprah Winfrey" and "Phil Donahue" programs she finds that such TV talk shows are blatantly anti-religious in their attitudes and discussions. For example, says Dr. Sterk, "During any given week, viewers may be offered a menu including women who were arrested while naked, transsexual twins,...sexual triangles...and women who harm their children for attention." The only thing such TV talk shows do not tolerate is moral judgment or the articulation of a reasonably presented and intelligently articulated Judeo-Christian perspective on the issues. Take, for example, a recent "Donahue" program in which a woman told how she committed adultery and bore another man's child, not informing her husband until the baby was over a year old that it was not his child. Dr. Helen Sterk points out that "When a caller said he found this immoral and not worthy of attention, Donahue called him a "jerk" and "Reverend Pooh-Bah.""

TV Violence Linked with Children Violence Behavior

TV critics, though, have focused most of their attention on sex and violence on TV dramatic and comedic programs. For example, Dr. Leonard Eron, head of the American Psychological Association (APA), points out that after studying the effects of TV violence on our thinking and conduct, he has come to the conclusion that a steady diet of TV violence definitely contributes to anti-social thinking and violent behavior. In conjunction with Dr. Eron's study is the report from a 9-member APA committee which examined for 5 years the negative and positive consequences of TV; the committee reports a definite link between TV violence and the development of violent, anti-social behavior in children.

According to Dr. Brandon Centerwall, a Seattle, Washington, psychiatrist and educator, strong evidence exists linking violence on TV and in the movies with 50 percent of the crime and violence in American society, and in 2 other countries. Dr. Centerwall estimates there would be 10,000 fewer murders, 70,000 fewer rapes, 1 million fewer auto thefts, 2.5 million fewer burglaries and 10 million fewer larcenies each year in this nation if not for so much violence on TV and in the movies.

The Golden Rule of Good Programs

What makes a TV program or a movie a good program or movie?

In his new booklet **Film Makers-Film Viewers** (Boston, Mass.: Daughters of St. Paul Publishing Co.), Los Angeles' Roman Catholic Archbishop Roger Mahony observes: "The Golden Rule applies here. Responsible film makers will not do to their audiences what they would not want done to themselves or to their teenage sons and daughters...In trying to please their audiences, they will not pander to basic instincts, to narcissism, hedonism and greed. Nor will they tell their viewers part of the truth...and withhold the other part...that...demands hard work, discipline and unselfish love."

In sharp contrast to all the popular TV programs and movies saturated with sex, violence and anti-religious hostility is CBS TV's series "Brooklyn Bridge," which affirms such traditional values as religious faith, decency, and the beauty of good family life and friendship. One of the nicest features of "Brooklyn Bridge" is the developing friendship of Katie, a young Irish-Catholic girl, and Alan, a young Jewish boy. In one episode, Katie and Alan bring their respective families together in a Chinese restaurant, where they help them overcome religious and ethnic bigotry and prejudice and see the positive aspects of each other's religious and ethnic identities and teach them to become friends. Indeed, it is beautiful and touching to watch Katie and Alan growing as human beings and developing in self-respect and in respect for others.

Jennifer Lewis, the lovely and graceful young actress who portrays Katie Monahan in "Brooklyn Bridge," communicates a wholesomeness and a spiritual beauty, purity and innocence that are so rare, remarkable and precious today. Watching Jennifer's acting is like watching a lovely ballerina dancing at her very best. When Jennifer smiles, her eyes light up and she radiates an inner grace and beauty. When Jennifer appears in a scene, her eyes glow and she lights up the screen with her grace, charm, beauty and professionalism.

Mr. Gow is a columnist who has published more than 1,000 articles and reviews in 100 magazines and newspapers.