

Dr. Lewis V. Spencer
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TV MOVIES AS MEGATEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

In 1951 the Supreme Court considered a case entitled *Burstein v Wilson* about a movie containing material objectionable to a major church group. On this occasion the Court declared movies equivalent to newspapers and protected by the Free Speech Amendment to the Constitution. This established a strong precedent protecting all movies and videos, whether on TV or not, whether pornographic or violent, whether on the Internet, radio, or TV, etc. This completed the destruction of the Hays Office, which consistently had protected the public. Hays' resignation, and his death occurred close to 1951.

During the 10-20 years following 1951, television sales throughout this country multiplied by a factor of nearly 100, so that many households had several, and often children have had them in bedrooms (see Fig. 1). In addition, types of programs diversified to include foci on violence, sex, and crime to an extent not contemplated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The largest source of such materials was, and is, in movies that are amplified by re-broadcast over TV. Such movies can be designed to attract audiences heavily weighted with teens and even younger children, even if rated "for adults."

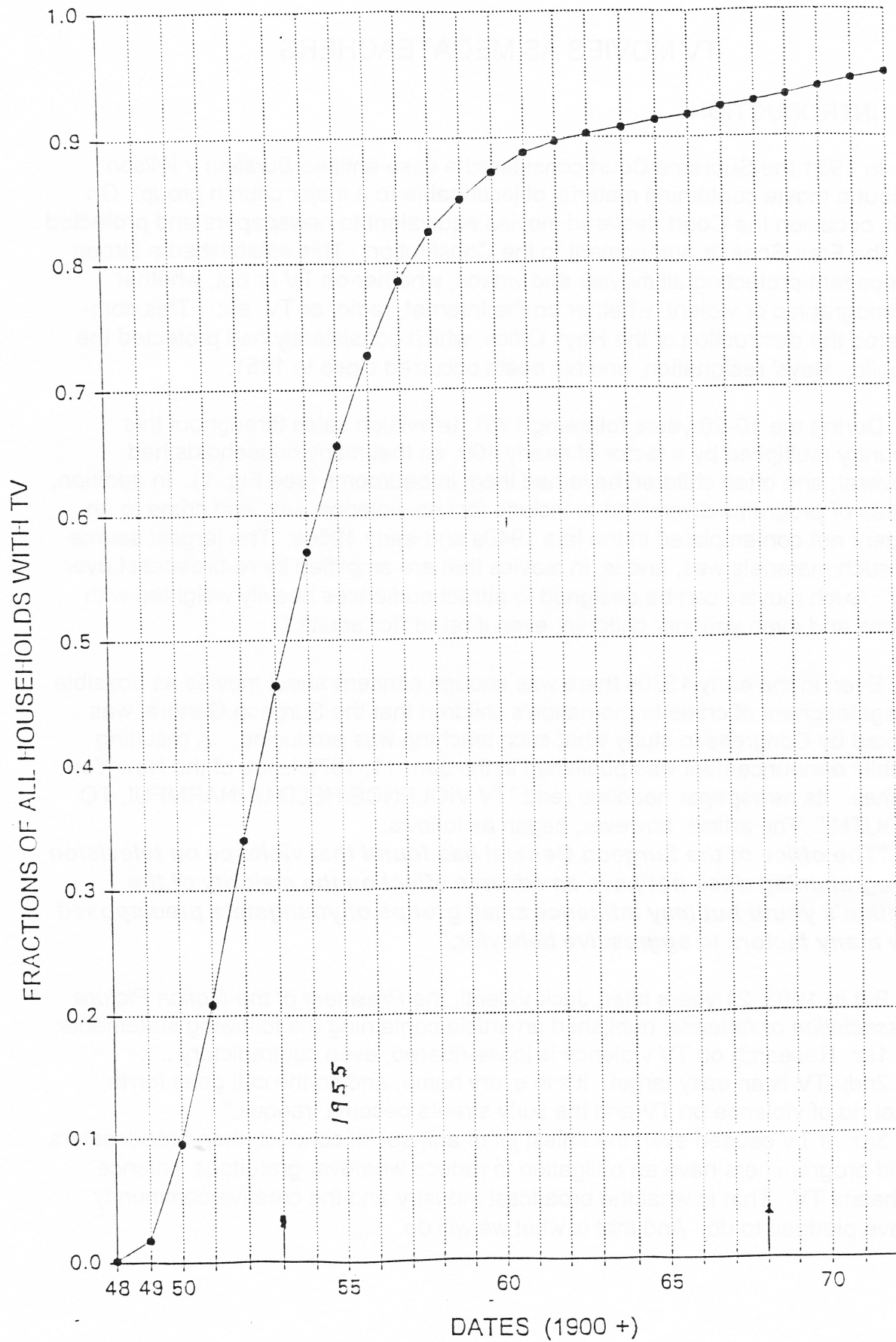
Even in the early 1970s there was enough concern about movies as possible megateachers of crime to the nation's children that the Surgeon General was asked by Congress to study what such teaching was producing. A resulting public announcement was published in the Jan. 11, 1972 issue of the New York Times. Its newspaper headline read "TV VIOLENCE HELD UNHARMFUL TO YOUTH." The article, however, began as follows:

"The office of the Surgeon General has found that violence on television programming does not have an adverse effect on the majority of the nation's youth but may influence small groups of youngsters predisposed by many factors to aggressive behavior."

But in 1993, 21 years later, Jack Valenti, the President of the Motion Picture Association of America, published an article containing the following statements:

- 1st: Research on TV violence is loose-fibered, even contradictory
- 2nd: TV is an easy target. It's in every home, and so the call goes forth, "get rid of violence on TV and the surly streets become tranquil."
- 3rd: If TV caused even the tiniest jot of anti-social conduct, then broadcasters and programmers have an obligation to reduce whatever gratuitous violence inhabits TV. That is what the broadcast industry and the creative community have pledged to do. And that is what we will do.

Fig. 1 This displays the growth of television. As you can see, 1953 is a good year to assign as a starting date. *The Early Window, 1973*



4th: The real cop-out is the failure of parentsand poverty, loss of hope or family ties, easy access to weapons. breakdown of discipline in schools, slackening interest in church, and (failures of) parental responsibility.

Despite these opinions of Pres. Valenti, I must say that I find the research summarized in ***The Early Window*** books to be surprisingly well-organized. And Edition 1 (1973) shows an astonishingly large body of research between 1951 and 1972. The same applies to the **3rd** edition of ***The Early Window***. The **1st Edition** listed and summarized 60 research summaries on children and violence which had already been completed and published. Pres. Valenti was not a scholar and was unlikely to have followed any of this research. Certainly by far the most interesting of his comments is the 3rd above, for which I know of **no concrete evidence** of further support by Hollywood or by Pres. Valenti.

And by the 1980s this research basis could have supported a much better decision by the Supreme Court than ***Burstein v Wilson*** (1951), which assigned absolutely zero responsibility to movie makers-and-showers.

This short paper is designed mainly to emphasize the existence of what I call "Killer Movies" or more politely, "Homicidal Movies." These will be defined as movies with a significant probability of causing some watching element of our varied populace to respond by carrying out an act of murderous violence. The following demonstrates that such movies most certainly exist and have existed.

THE DOOMSDAY FLIGHT (p. 1, ***The Early Window***, 1973)

Let us begin with the history of a movie with the above title, first aired on Dec. 13, 1966 by the Nat. Broadcasting Co. In this film a bomb was placed aboard an airplane by a man who then telephoned the airline, offering to disclose its location in exchange for a huge ransom. Prior to Dec. 13, the AirLines Pilots Association had objected strenuously to the film. They feared that a television showing might lead to similar real-life actions.

These fears were justified. One bomb threat was received before the program was over; 4 additional threats were made in the next 24 hours. And by the end of the week 8 more threats had been received by various major airlines. This one movie showing represented an increase to 8 times the number of threats over the previous month!

When the *Doomsday Flight* was shown again in Australia in May 1971, the results were equally dramatic. Victimized by the scheme of the movie, Qantas Airlines paid \$500,000 to safeguard the lives of 116 passengers en route to Hong Kong.

This case is far from unique; see the simpler, documented cases in Figs. 2 and 3, from the First Edition of *The Early Window*, (1973), pp. 2,3.

A little later (1986) *The New England Journal of Medicine* gave evidence that teenage suicides increase following broadcasts about suicide, whether fictional or news features. See Fig. 3.

The First Edition of *The Early Window* also included a useful graph showing the growth of television in this country among the various families. We include it here as Fig.1. This growth became exceedingly rapid starting just before 1950. And it began to saturate near 90% **of this country's households** just before 1960. While it isn't certain to what extent households of different types and sizes were more prone or less to purchase a TV set, Fig. 1 gives a good first approximation to the rapidity of growth among individual citizens of any selected age. And note that the curve in Fig. 1 doesn't necessarily rise to unity, because some households can choose not to participate.

DRUGS AND HOMICIDES

Fig. 1 indicates that once TV sets were for sale in this country, there was a rapid spread, so that within about 10 years their possession was nearly universal. It follows that any linkage between *Television* and crime would vanish for broadcasts prior to 1950, but would depend, country-wide and nearly full scale, for broadcasts occurring from about 1960 and later.

This suggests that we focus on types of crime that would have been rare prior to 1950. One such would have been arrests for drug misuse by young people of Jr. High ages. Fig. 4 compares the rise of arrests of young people under 15 years of age (at the right) with the rise of TV ownership as presented in Fig. 1. That the two curves are closely parallel is evident from near-equal lengths of the horizontal line segments.

Introduction of a major new type of crime such as drug arrests will have a strong effect on all types of violence thereafter. Other effects of TV and the influence of drug purchase and use will to a large extent add independently to later robberies, rapes, homicides, and aggravated assaults, and very likely complicate the structure of each type of violent data.

Homicides by early teens were also rare enough in the 1950s to give evidence of major, sudden increases. Homicides were explored by Brandon Centerwall in

Fig. 2. Some testimonies presented before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee investigating Juvenile Delinquency (1961).

The Washington Daily News (Dec. 10, 1958)

A juvenile court judge told about a recent case where kids had committed a burglary by the professional method of forcing a skylight. The judge said that when he questioned the boys, they told him they had seen such a robbery committed on a TV show.

The Evening Star, Washington, D.C. (Dec. 18, 1958)

A 15-year-old youth admitted in juvenile court that bizarre acts he had committed against his neighbors had been inspired by television. Not only did he steal property, but he also sent ransom notes to his victims in exchange for the stolen material. He admitted stuffing papers in a woman's mailbox and the backdoor to her house and leaving a note, "See what happened, I'll do worse next time."

The New York Journal-American (July 9, 1959)

Four young boys desiring a human skull for their club activities, broke into a Jersey City mauseum, pried open a coffin and took one. They brought the skull to their clubroom where they desecrated it by sticking a lighted candle in it. Astonished police said the 7 boys, ages 11-14, got the idea from a TV horror show.

The Chicago Tribune (Nov. 22, 1959)

Two Chicago boys had been arrested for attempting to extort \$500 from a firm through a bomb threat. They threatened both owners and family members if police were notified. The boys ... stated they got their idea from television.

The Reading Eagle, Reading, Pa (March 2, 1960)

A 16-year-old boy was arrested after neighbors spotted him entering the cellar of a home. He was wearing gloves so that he did not leave fingerprints, a trick he had learned from TV shows he had watched.

The Denver Post (April 10, 1960)

An arrested college athlete in Grand Junction had mailed letters threatening to kill the wife of a bank president unless he was paid \$5000. When arrested he said he got his idea from TV shows.

The New York Journal-American (Dec. 22, 1960) *An 11-year-old, with a 7-year-old accomplice, admitted burglarizing Long Island homes for more than \$1000 in cash and valuables. The boy learned his technique by watching it done on television.*

Fig. 3. Several similar cases reported by Schramm and his associates from their investigations (See p, 48, *The Early Window* (1973).)

In a Boston Suburb:

A nine-year old boy reluctantly showed his father a report card heavily decorated with red marks, then proposed one way of getting to the heart of his problem; they could give the teacher a box of poisoned chocolates for Christmas. "It's easy, Dad, they did it on TV last week. A man wanted to kill his wife, so he gave her candy with poison in it and she didn't know who did it."

In Brooklyn, New York:

A six-year old son of a policeman asked his father for real bullets because his little sister "doesn't die for real when I shoot her like they doe when Hopalong Cassidy kills 'em."

In Los Angeles:

A housemaid caught a seven-year-old boy in the act of sprinkling ground glass into the family's lamb stew. ... This was purely experimental, inspired by curiosity to learn whether it would really work as well as it did on television.

From Family Circle (1982)

Suicide of a six-year-old imitating a hangman scene of a cartoon.

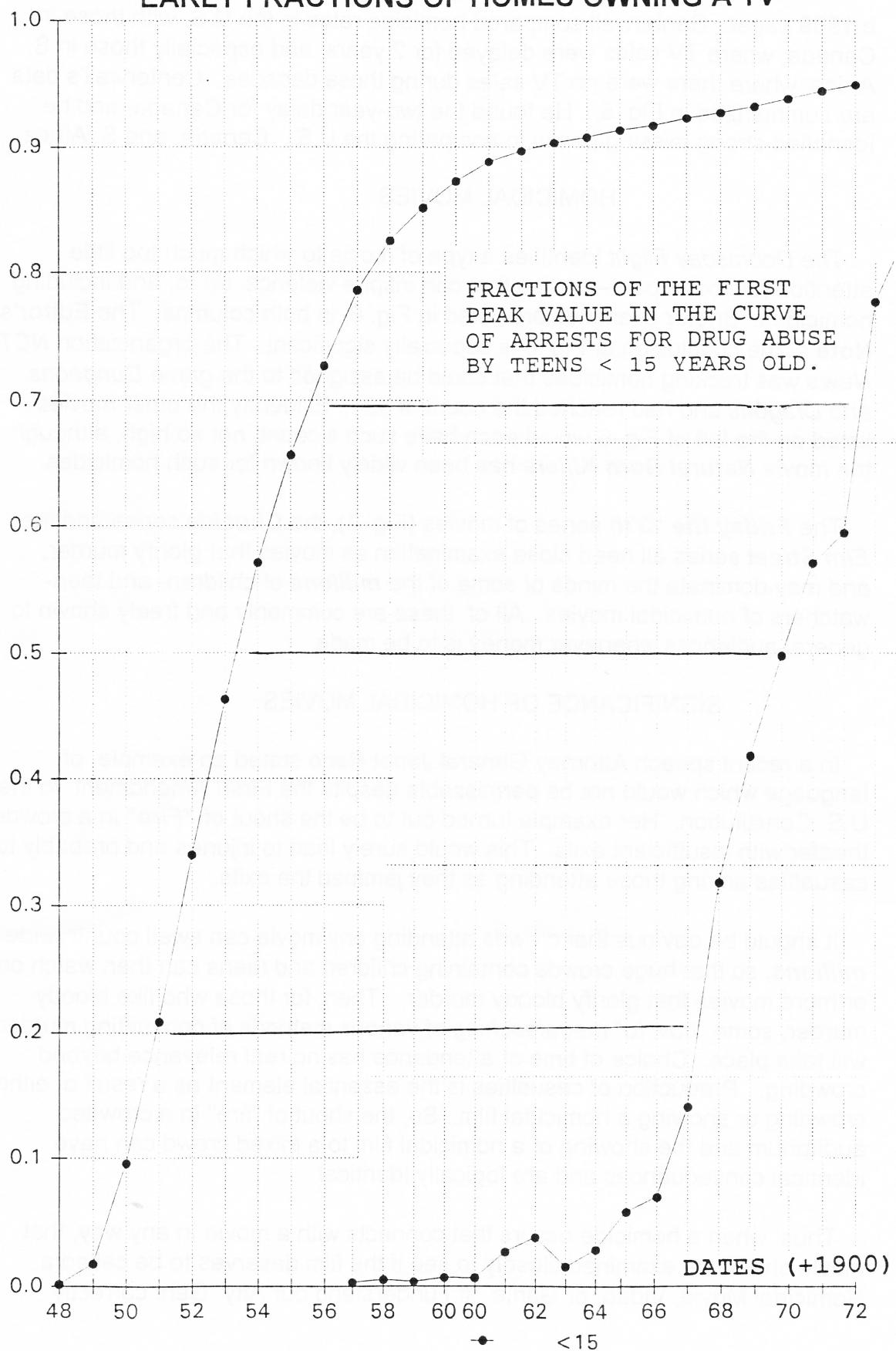
Other Suicides (1982, 1983)

*An 18-year-old was inspired by another hangman scene in *Hill Street Blues*, and a 13-year-old, who shot himself when deprived of TV.*

Fig.4

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EARLY FRACTIONS OF HOMES OWNING A TV



a 1989 paper. Centerwall compared homicide rates in the U.S. with those in Canada, where TV sales were delayed for 2 years, and especially those in S. Africa, where there were no TV sales during those decades. Centerwall's data are summarized in Fig. 5. He found the two-year delay for Canada; and he identified strong missing peaks in comparing the U.S., Canada, and S. Africa.

HOMICIDAL MOVIES

The Doomsday Flight identifies a type of movie to which much too little attention has been paid--movies that can inspire violence up to, and including homicides. Briefer examples are listed in Fig. 6, in both columns. The **Editor's Note** at the conclusion of Fig. 6 is especially significant. The organization **NCTV News** was tracking homicides that could be assigned to the game *Dungeons and Dragons* and had reached the count of 124. Evidently the other movies listed on the left of Fig. 6 would each have such a count, not so high, although the movie *Natural Born Killers* has been widely known for such homicides.

The *Friday the 13'th* series of movies (Fig. 7), the *Chuckie* series and the *Elm Street* series all need close examination as movies that glorify murder, and may dominate the minds of some of the *millions* of children- and teen-watchers of homicidal movies. All of these are commonly and freely shown to general audiences whenever money is to be made.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HOMICIDAL MOVIES

In a recent speech Attorney General Janet Reno stated an example of language which would not be permissible despite the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Her example turned out to be the shout of "**Fire**" in a crowded theater with insufficient exits. This would surely lead to injuries and probably to casualties among those attending as they jammed the exits.

It should be obvious that crowds attending any movie can swell countrywide to *millions*, so that huge crowds containing children and teens can then watch one or more movies that glorify bloody murder. Then, for those who like bloody murder, some "*how to*" *megateaching* of various methods of committing murder will take place. Choice of time of attendance has no real relevance beyond crowding: Production of casualties is the essential element as a result of either crowding or showing a homicidal film. So, the shout of "fire" in a crowded auditorium and the showing of a homicidal film to a mixed crowd can have identical consequences and are logically identical.

Thus, when a homicide occurs that connects with a movie in any way, that movie should be examined closely to see if the film deserves to be called a Homicidal Movie, Video, or Game. If I understand our Atty. Gen. correctly,

Fig. 5

Centerwall's comparisons of homicide rates with ownership rates in the U.S., with a S. Africa lacking TV ownership, and with Canada, TV ownership two years delayed.

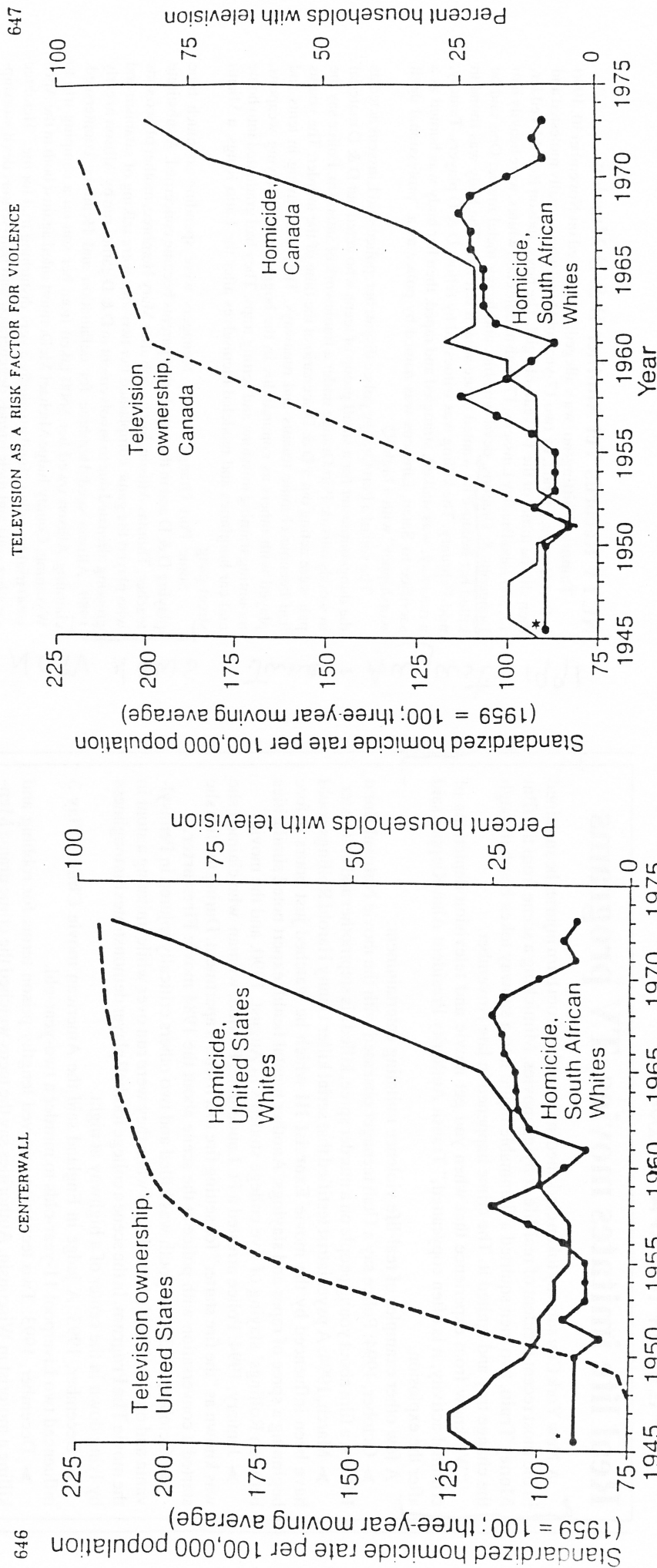


FIGURE 2. Television ownership and homicide rates: Canadians and white South Africans, 1945-1973. The 1945 homicide rate for South African whites is a six-year average (1943-1948). Television broadcasting was not permitted in South Africa prior to 1975. Sources: television data, Dominion Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; homicide data, vital statistics bureaus of the governments of Canada and South Africa (8). Reprinted with permission (8).

FIGURE 1. Television ownership and white homicide rates: United States and South Africa, 1945-1973. The 1945 homicide rate for South African whites is a six-year average (1943-1948). Television broadcasting was not permitted in South Africa prior to 1975. Sources: television data, Television Bureau of Advertising, New York, NY; homicide data, vital statistics bureaus of the governments of the United States and South Africa (8). Reprinted with permission (8).

Fig. 6.

Feb. 1996, AFA Journal

Real life imitates movies, TV programs

A New York City subway token clerk died in December from burn injuries he sustained in the most recent incident of real-life copying movies. Mimicking a scene from the film **Money Train**, two men squirted a flammable liquid into a subway token booth through the change tray and ignited it. The crime happened in late November.

"We know from experience that when you get movie and television depictions of criminal activity, it is often copycatted," Transit Authority President Alan Kiepper said after the explosion.

A few other examples of real-life violence imitating entertainment:

- October, 1994: Police say a Utah teenager obsessed with the movie **Natural Born Killers**, a film about young people on a murder spree, killed his stepmother and half sister.
- March, 1994: A psychiatrist testified that serial killer Danny Harold Rollings could have been influenced by the movie **Exorcist III** which he watched just hours before beginning a spree of rapes and slayings. Another mental health expert noted similarities between Rollings' slaying of five college students in August, 1990, and the movie.
- January, 1994: Police arrested a Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, woman who claimed she was known as "the fire starter" for setting fire to a friend's apartment. During the fire she started a conversation with police at the scene about the 1984 movie **Firestarter**.
- October, 1993: One youth was killed and two others critically injured in Pennsylvania and on New York's Long Island when they were run over while imitating a stunt in the movie **The Program**. In the scene a college football player demonstrates his toughness by lying down in the center of a highway at night.
- December, 1993: A judge in England said the American movie **Child's Play 3** influenced two Liverpool 11-year-olds to murder a two-year-old.
- December, 1993: Two teenagers received lengthy prison terms for robbing and killing a motorist in Wisconsin. Authorities say the teens watched the crime drama **Menace II Society** before trying to rob their 50-year-old victim.
- November, 1993: A forensic psychiatrist who testified for the prosecution during the trial of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer said Dahmer would watch such movies as **Hellraiser II** before going to cruise for victims.
- August, 1993: A 5-year old Ohio boy who began playing with matches after watching a fire-is-fun episode of the MTV cartoon **Beavis and Butt-head** sets his mobile home ablaze, killing his younger sister.
- October, 1984: A Milwaukee man splashed gasoline on his wife and burned her to death after watching the TV movie **The Burning Bed**, about a woman who sets fire to an abusive husband.

Clarion Ledger (Jackson, MS) 11/28/95, Commercial Appeal (Memphis, TN), 12/2/95, past issues of AFA Journal

NCTV Records Yet Another D & D Murder

Tammy Whittington was allegedly murdered on November 30, 1990 in Port Orange, Florida, by two 17-year-old boys who sexually molested and then slit the throat of the 14-year-old girl. The boys, Judson Ronald Vedder, 17, and John Bradley Linssens, 17, both middle class whites, were heavily into **Dungeons & Dragons**, devil worship, and heavy metal music. One said he killed her because he wanted to see what it felt like. The body was found in mid-February. The killing was witnessed by fellow D & D players, Tammy, a runaway, was stalked, strangled and raped, then her body was burned as a sacrifice to Satan. Linssens was named by police as a "professional devil worshipper" with a high IQ.

The son of a Port Orange police dispatcher, police said Linssens acted as the dungeonmaster for a small group of teens who acted out D & D material in woods outside Port Orange under a framework of satanism. Police say the pair were acting out a D & D scenario at the time of the murder. The youths had become chronic truants and runaways. They were living in tents and played with others as commandos in the boggy forest, carrying weapons, mounting training missions and setting traps. They had graduated into home and car burglaries and modeled themselves after the Latin Kings, a Miami street gang.

Some Port Orange County teenagers were spending so much time playing D & D and in the woods that parents became concerned. A substitute teacher, Thomas Allison, lost his job after Mary Hembree, mother of two sons who played the game complained her two sons were talking of satanism and growing alienated due to involvement in D & D games run by Allison in early 1989. Allison sued Hembree for defamation and Hembree countersued, claiming Allison owed her \$600 taken from her son on a camping trip to Wyoming. County Judge Michael McDermott ruled against both in the April 1990 trial he called "fundamentally a very disturbing trial for me." Hembree says her sons and their friends degenerated into half-serious devil worshippers. According to investigators, Linssens believed he could summon the devil through fire, something done in D & D.

Editor's Note: This is the 124th **Dungeons and Dragons**-related murder on file at NCTV. The game, introduced in 1974 by TSR Inc. of Lake Geneva, Wis., is a role-playing game in which players assume the identity of fantasy characters from medieval folklore and myth and J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy of fantasy novels, "The Lord of the Rings." NCTV has repeatedly expressed concerns about the game as it "lends itself to an interest in the occult and has a heavy-duty component of violence" (*Daytona Beach Sunday News Journal* 3/24/91).

NCTV News June - August 1991

Fig. 7

By C. RAY HALL
The Courier-Journal

What could be worse than standing in the video-rental store with a thirst for blood and no clear memory of which "Friday the 13th" movie is which? That's one horror you need not face today, with this capsule guide to all nine movies.

Some of them are on TV late tonight, or very early tomorrow:

■ 11 p.m. tonight: "Friday the 13th Part VII: Jason Takes Manhattan" is on the USA cable network.

■ 1 a.m. tomorrow: "Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood" is on USA.

■ 3 a.m. tomorrow: "Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning" is on the Cinemax premium-movie channel.

Friday the 13th (1980)

Body count: 10*

Plot: Camp Crystal Lake is reopening after 20 years. This opens old wounds for Jason's mom, Betsy Palmer, who decides to open a few new ones.

Memorable murders: Arrow thrust through throat, via mattress, as Kevin Bacon indulges in postsex reveries; Betsy Palmer relieved of her head, still gesturing with hands.

Redeeming social value: One doomed camper promotes vegetarianism and quotes inventors.

Rip-off/homages: "Halloween."

Extra credit: Hair Styles by Six Feet Under, of Westport, Conn.

Sample dialogue: "Just wait till he lands on My Old Kentucky Home." (Camp counselor playing "strip Monopoly.")

Friday the 13th Part 2 (1981)

Body count: Seven*

Plot: Jason himself comes to life in this one, after making only a cameo appearance in the original, to avenge his mother's death. Heavy breathing ensues. So does trouble breathing.

Memorable murder: Ice pick in temple after discovery of severed head in fridge.

Redeeming social value: At one point, nearly 39 minutes go by between murders.

Rip-off/homages: "Psycho."

Sample dialogue: "You're all doomed. You're all doomed" (Ralph, the town crazy).

Sample dialogue: "All dead. Some emergency." (A disappointed emergency medical technician.)

Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning (1985)

Body count: 20

Plot: Tommy's all grown now, and out of the institution, in a sort of halfway camp. When a grossly annoying camper is axed, people suspect Jason, but it's someone else. (Hint: Note the guy overacting when they examine the first body. No, not that guy overacting, the other one.)

Memorable murders: Emergency road flare jammed into mouth; pruning shears applied noisily to eye sockets; railroad spike rammed through head, stapling the head's owner to tree.

Redeeming social value: None. It offers the most obscenity, the most graphic violence, the worst villain, the least appealing cast and the cheesiest production values.

Sample dialogue: "I want this loony bin closed down. . . . You think I don't know what those perverts were doin' in my yard?" (Bad-neighbor Ethel, who, unbeknownst to her, has a rendezvous with a meat cleaver.)

Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives (1986)

Body count: 18

Plot: Tommy and a pal dig up Jason's grave. Lightning strikes Jason and brings him to life. Nobody believes Tommy but the sheriff's daughter. They use a chain, rock and motorboat propeller to send Jason to a watery grave.

Memorable murders: Woman, gassed in swampy water after offering cash and American Express card as tribute.

Redeeming social value: The first victim is Ron Palillo, who played Arnold Horshack, the nasally annoying "sweathog" in "Welcome Back, Kotter." The movie is eight minutes old when Jason rams a fist completely through him.

Rip-off/homages: "My Darling Clementine," James Bond movies.

Sample dialogue:

Girl camper: "I'm cold."

Boy camper: "Why don't we crawl in the sack?"

Girl: "Why don't you fix a fire?"

Boy: "There's no wood."

Girl: "We're in a forest."

Friday the 13th Part 3 (1982)

Body count: 12

Plot: This is the 3-D version, down on the farm, with a comedy star who is somewhat amnesiac about a previous encounter with Jason. When she remembers, she buries an axe in his head, to temporary avail.

Memorable murder: Machete to back while walking on hands, brains squeezed out.

Redeeming social value: The guy who had his brains squeezed out was really dumb.

Sample dialogue: "Was it you, me or the hammock?" (Young woman puzzling over unexpected ecstasy.)

Friday the 13th Part IV: The Final Chapter (1984)

Body count: Nine

Plot: Jason rises from the dead at the hospital, kills a lecherous doc and his prey, and returns to camp to dispatch the young folks. He's done in, theoretically, by a kid, Tommy (Corey Feldman).

Memorable murder: Jigsaw to throat.

Redeeming social value: Any value is offset by the fraudulent title, and by the injection of Roman numerals into the title, implying great importance.

Extra credit: Skinny-dipping twins.

Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday (1993)

Body count: 17

Plot: The feds blow Jason apart, but his heart lives on and his murderous spirit infests others. He reunites with his sister in a way you don't want to know about (so they don't show it).

Memorable murders: Deputy sheriff bubbles, hemorrhages and melts after passing Jason's life force to a yuppie tabloid-TV anchor. (We are not making this up.)

Rip-offs/homages: "Alien," "Star Wars," "Plan 9 From Outer Space."

Redeeming social value: Maybe it really is the final "Friday."

Sample dialogue: "Plannin' on smokin' a little dope, havin' a little premarital sex and gettin' slaughtered?" (Driver, after picking up three doomed hitchhikers)

Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood (1988)

Body count: 17

Plot: A girl with telekinetic powers and an unscrupulous shrink (played by Terry Kiser, the late Bernie in the "Weekend" movies) unintentionally summons Jason from the deep. In the end, she sends him back there, with a side trip through a burning, exploding house.

Memorable murders: Woman tied up in a sleeping bag and bashed against a tree.

Redeeming social value: It's nudity-free! (It's also the darkest of the movies: on a small TV screen, many scenes fade almost entirely to black.)

Sample dialogue: "We'd better turn around, because I've seen enough horror movies to know a weirdo wearing a mask is never friendly." (VW Beetle driver, in deep woods.)

Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan (1989)

Body count: 15

Plot: Jason, rescued from his watery grave by a jolt of electricity, joins some high-schoolers as they set sail for the Big Apple. Trouble ensues as the rite of spring becomes last rites. Surprise: An emotionally troubled teen holds the key to Jason's downfall (with an assist from the toxic waste in New York's sewers).

Memorable murders: Boxer's head knocked off, lands in garbage can; school principal dunked face-down in barrel of toxic sludge.

Redeeming social value: A punk rocker is bashed with her guitar.

Sample dialogue:

Girl to waitress: "You don't understand. There is a maniac trying to kill us."

Waitress: "Welcome to New York."

*In some cases, body counts are estimates.

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Homicidal Movies, Games and Videos should have no First Amendment protection and should not be making rich those involved in their production.

FINAL REMARKS

Earlier in February, on Lincoln's birthday, I asked my wife if we had a copy of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. In 5 minutes she had found one and handed it to me. In glancing through the introduction I was again reminded that in the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court that preceded the debates by 2 years or so, those lawyers took a position in full support of Douglas and totally against Lincoln's position. From the conflict which followed, I conclude that *those* Supreme Court lawyers were paving the way for the armies and battles which followed.

And I find unsettling similarities between the Dred Scott Case and the Burstein v Wilson circumstances and decision, mainly in the Court's determination to avoid considering right vs wrong, killing the Hays Office so that Hollywood-- like the slave owners--is free to determine any standards of right and wrong.

REFERENCES

The following references have been on my shelf, and they should be suggestive of the intense interest in this subject on the part of schools, the government and many parents.

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