

Sociology- Middle College
June 2008
Summer Assignment
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Directions: Read the attached articles “Addicted to Violence” by Stanley Crouch and “Getting the Facts Straight on Media Violence” by Paul McMasters. In complete sentences, answer the questions at the end of each article.

Next, write an essay in which you argue whether moviemakers should be held legally responsible for the consequences of their films. Consider the effects of freedom of expression on holding moviemakers liable years after their movies are released. You must use your own experiences as well as evidence from newspaper and magazine articles to support your argument. Be certain to use standard MLA format when citing your sources. Please include a bibliography page at the end of your essay.

On the reverse side of this sheet is a rubric, which will be used to score your essay. Please use it to help you develop, write and revise your paper.

Your essay must be double-spaced typed in 12 point Times Roman font. Your essay should be approximately 3-4 pages in length (not including the bibliography page). This assignment will count as 10% of your grade for the 1st marking period. Failure to complete this assignment will adversely affect your grade for the aforesaid marking period.

THIS ASSIGNMENT IS DUE ON WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 3, 2008 NO LATER THAN THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD.

PLEASE NOTE THAT STUDENTS WILL RECEIVE 5 EXTRA CREDIT POINTS TOWARDS THEIR SUMMER ASSIGNMENT GRADE, IF THEY SUBMIT THEIR PAPERS ON OR BEFORE MONDAY, AUGUST 18TH.

NEW JERSEY REGISTERED HOLISTIC SCORING RUBRIC

In scoring, consider the grid of written language	1	2	3	4	5	6
Content And Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lack opening and/or closing Minimal response to topic; uncertain focus No planning evident; disorganized Details random, inappropriate, or barely apparent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lack opening and/or closing Attempts to focus May drift or shift focus Attempts organization Few, if any, transitions between ideas Details lack elaboration, i.e., highlight paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lack opening and/or closing Usually has single focus Some lapses or flaws in organization May lack some transitions between ideas Repetitious details Several unelaborated details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lack opening and/or closing Single focus Ideas loosely connected Transitions evident Uneven development of details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally has opening and closing Single focus Sense of unity and coherence Key ideas developed Logical progression of ideas Moderately fluent Attempts compositional risks Details appropriate and varied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has opening and closing Single, distinct focus Unified and coherent Well developed Logical progression of ideas Fluent, cohesive Compositional risks successful Details effective, vivid, explicit, and/or pertinent
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No apparent control Severe/numerous errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Errors/patterns of errors may be evident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some errors that do not interfere with meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few, if any, errors
Sentence Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assortment of incomplete and/or incorrect sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excessive monotony/same structure Numerous errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little variety in syntax Some errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some errors that do not interfere with meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few, if any, errors
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Errors so severe they detract from meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous serious errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns of errors evident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No consistent pattern of errors Some errors that do not interfere with meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few, if any, errors

NON-SCORABLE RESPONSES	(FR) Fragment	Student wrote too little to allow a reliable judgement of his/her writing.
	(OT) Off Topic/ Off Task	Student did not write on the assigned topic/task, or the student attempted to copy the prompt.
	(NE) Not English	Student wrote in a language other than English.
	(NR) No Response	Student refused to write on the topic, or the writing task folder was blank.

Content/Organization	Usage	Sentence Construction	Mechanics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates intended message to intended audience Relates to topic Opening and closing Focused Logical progression of ideas Transitions Appropriate details and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tense formation Subject-verb agreement Pronouns usage/agreement Word choice/meaning Proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of formations Correct construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills intact in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelling Capitalization Punctuation

Addicted to Violence

Stanley Crouch

In his essay, Stanley Crouch argues that the movies have contributed to the rise of street gangs, to distrust of government and the army, and to the idea that violence is a reasonable solution to major social problems.

Words to Know

blaxploitation movies made in the early 1970s to exploit the market for films about blacks

consensus agreement

ethos attitudes, habits, characteristics of a group

maudlin very foolishly sentimental

naif innocent person

retrospect looking back, thinking about

Getting Started

Do you think the violence depicted in movies has influenced people to behave violently toward each other?

Our society has gotten to the point where we might soon become less and less shocked by any kind of violence. A little girl is shot to death after arguing with a little boy who has grown up in a world of drugs and disorder, one in which he could get an illegal firearm and take it to school with him. A fireman goes mad and shoots a couple of people to death. Before that, the country was wringing its hands because a couple of Columbine oddballs felt that they had taken enough criticism from their peers. Then, while walking the yard in the federal "supermax" prison in Florence, Colorado, where they both were held until last summer, the Oklahoma City bomber and the Unabomber discovered that, politics aside, they had a lot in common.

What all of these people have in common is a set of ideas that have been pumped into society for quite some time now, from every direction imaginable. When I was living in Los Angeles 30 years ago, gang violence had largely simmered down, until *The Godfather*, a masterpiece, arrived in movie houses and did for street gangs the same thing that *Birth of a Nation* did for the Ku Klux Klan five-and-a-half decades earlier. (One of the street gangs that came into existence after the film was called "The

Family.") That was far from what Francis Ford Coppola had in mind, but such are the odd twists of a society in which the idea of the metaphor seems to have no weight. Too, too much is taken literally.

This and the many other gangster films that formed a trend helped 3 create the ethos out of which rose the Crips and the Bloods and the many, many drive-by murders that eventually became a national crisis. Kids started joining gangs and parents started trying to move them out of that gang environment if they could. The blaxploitation films that kicked off with *Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song* in 1971 were also important because they glamorized Negro criminal types and elevated the idea that violence was fine and dandy because the rules of the system didn't apply to people who weren't white.

On the other side of the lane, as with the Oklahoma City bomber and 4 the Unabomber, there was consensus. It didn't matter if one got a right- or left-wing reading: The police, the FBI, the CIA and local and federal government were all too corrupt to depend on. In the South, during the civil rights movement years, underground tapes were circulated with titles like "For Segregationists Only"; they depicted those who attempted to bring constitutional rights below the Mason Dixon Line as invaders who had to be dealt with very, very firmly. That firmness took three dimensions in the form of assassinations, bombings, beatings, hosings and the killing, mutilating and bruising of men, women and children. In the North, Malcolm X, always a heckler of the nonviolent movement, was calling for rifle clubs and "busting them redneck crackers in the head."

In the wake of the Negro riots that moved along, almost summer to 5 summer, from 1964 to 1968, the Black Panther Party and the Weather Underground picked up on all of that Malcolm X rhetoric. During the anti-war years they put those ideas about self-defense and revolution into some thin Marxist wrappers and went to market calling for "offing the pig" and "bringing the war home." There were plenty of shootouts between the Panthers and the police, as well as between them and rival cultural nationalists who thought African cultural retention and reassertion were more sturdy than alliances with white people and using texts by Europeans like Karl Marx. The Weather Underground attacked people on the street, bombed police stations and robbed banks. The Wild West, Bonnie and Clyde and dreams of overthrowing the government came together.

In retrospect, there wasn't much actual difference between the violence 6 of those reactionaries in the South and those purported revolutionaries in the North. Because violence was the common reaction of greatest intensity, a new level of it became popular in the mass medium of film. Violence was a seat that could fit every rump. Once Arthur Penn's *Bonnie*

and Clyde and Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* cranked up the scale and realistic depiction of violence higher than ever, two kinds of things began to happen. From the right, there were the lone vigilante types, such as Charles Bronson's *Death Wish* character and Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry*. They had to break the rules because the system neither could nor would protect society from the demons who were rising from below. These men took the law into their own hands and blew away the riffraff. It had to be done. They had no choice. This made them heroes in rebellion against the system.

From the left end of the spectrum came all of the movies, culminating 7 in *JFK* that said, over and over and over, that the federal government and the army were corrupt, that most problems could be traced back to the CIA and that anyone who had faith in the system was, at best, a naif. The only thing one could have faith in was the fact that these institutions would forever play dirty tricks, try to cover them up and, when discovered, murder those who came across the muddy tracks that led to the powers that be.

The grand irony, however, is that Southern segregation was not brought 8 to an end, nor redneck violence dramatically reduced, by violence. They were taken care of by the passage of civil rights laws, the election of local black mayors and other officials and the imprisoning of whites for violent crimes against black people that were once ignored by the local police. Richard Nixon was not felled by bullets or mail bombs but by the freedom of the press and Senate hearings. Big business, for all its lobbying, is often put in line by investigative reporting, public scandals and multi-million-dollar judgments in court against those who put products on the market that are dangerous to their buyers.

But the myth of violent solutions as the ultimate solutions maintains 9 itself in much of popular media.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the Oklahoma City bomber and the 10 Unabomber would find that they have much in common. It is not, therefore, surprising that the marauding street gangs who have made receiving respect a life or death game would listen to rap recordings thick with references to blaxploitation, gangster and horror films in which blood is the sticky unit of exchange. It is not, therefore, surprising that anyone, no matter their color, their station in life, their religion, even their sex, might decide that the time has come to let the world know that things have gone too far, that the insults and indignities must be put to a stop and bullets and bombs alone can make clear just how reprehensible things are.

Does this mean that we have to go after the gun makers and demand 11 more of them? Sure. Does it mean that there should be a ban on violent films? In our world, bans only send things underground, where child

pornography is bought and sold. What this society has to do now is re-create an image of civilization that is neither painfully repressed nor maudlin. That's pretty clear. When a violent minority that crosses color lines comes to believe that killing those you know or do not know is a reasonable solution to problems, we are in need of another vision. Blowing up federal buildings, shooting other school kids because they make you angry and sending out bombs to express your rage against technology are the result of a brutal attitude toward difficulty, one that has been celebrated in our popular culture for far too long.

Questions About the Reading

- What does the writer seem to think is the main cause for violence in our society?
- Besides using bombs to commit their crimes, what do you think the Oklahoma City bomber and the Unabomber have in common?
- What does the writer say would be the effect of banning violent films?
- According to the writer, what does society have to do to counter the belief that violence is a solution to problems?

claim to give morality lessons." We are to understand, of course, that in this instance the disdain is directed not at Americans in general but at American media. In that, the French join cause with a substantial chunk of American punditry.

When a community is wracked by a tragedy of violence, we yearn to find a cause, something or someone to blame. Therefore, it is only natural, if not exactly rational, that a gaggle of psycho-babblists will waddle forth with their denunciations of "violence in the media." These days, the culprit of choice most often is television, but other targets include the movies, music, books, comics, video games and, yes, even the newspapers. It does seem that popular culture today is saturated with violent images and action, making it easier for the pundits to point the finger of blame at the media. Some have learned to call for "responsibility" rather than "regulation."

And that's fair enough. But while we're at it, how about a little more responsibility all around? For the media, for the pundits, for the regulators lurking in the background, and for the public itself.

Here are some thinking points:

First, get the facts straight.

Violence on network television has been declining steadily over the past three years, according to a report released in January by the Center for Communication Policy at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Public perception, largely the result of media emphasis, is that almost half of all violent crime is committed by juveniles; in fact, the figure is 19%.

Public perception is that violent crime among juveniles is increasing dramatically; actually, it has remained at about 20% for more than 100 years.

After a terrifying spike beginning in the 80s, the murder rate among young people declined 31% between 1993 and 1996, according to the National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Next, get the social science straight.

Studies that indicate a link between viewing violence and doing violence turn out to be either quite qualified in their conclusions or quite clumsy in their methodology.

Children form basic values at a very young age based primarily on family influence.

There is no way to safely predict whether a given stimulus will provoke positive, negative or neutral behavior, given the vagaries of human personality.

Finally, add a dose of common sense.

If juvenile crime and violence were a function of watching television, then incidents of violence and crime would be more evenly distributed

across demographic and geographic boundaries according to the availability of television. As a matter of fact, the rates vary greatly from community to community, class to class.

For the media, being more responsible means taking care with both 17 depictions of violence and discussions of violence as a social problem. For the pundits, being responsible means acknowledging that blaming the media can be a dangerous game as well as a zero-sum game. For the policy-makers, being responsible means resolving to quit pandering to fear and to start addressing the clearly demonstrable causes of violence in our society: poverty, guns, drugs, gangs and the declining influence of the family. For the rest of us, we must resist the impulse to take isolated events, such as the Jonesboro shootings, and turn them into a national trend. And we must recognize that, while blaming violence on the media may give us comfort, it will give us neither surcease nor solutions.

Questions About the Reading

1. According to the writer, why do we want to blame the media when there is a violent tragedy?
2. What do we most often blame for violence?
3. According to the writer, what should we consider in determining the cause or causes of violence?
4. What does the writer think are the causes of violence in our society?