

## **Trained to Kill**

by Dave Grossman

*This article was based on a presentation in an international peace conference in Bethel College, Kansas, and was published in the August, 1998 issue of Christianity Today. Since then it has been reprinted in numerous periodicals around the world.*

### **Murder Simulators**

Michael Carneal, the 14-year-old mass murderer in the Paducah, Kentucky school shootings had never fired a pistol in his life. He stole a .22 pistol from a neighbor, fired a few practice shots, and took it to school.

FBI data shows that trained law enforcement officers average around 20% hits in real world situations at an average distance of 21 feet. In the 1998 Amadu Dialo shooting, four NYPD officers fired 41 shots at an unarmed African immigrant, at point blank range and hit him 19 times. This is about the level of accuracy you will find from trained marksmen in real world situations. In Los Angeles, in 1999, a neo-Nazi walked into a Jewish daycare center and fired over 70 shots, wounding five helpless children. This is the norm from untrained shooters.

Michael Carneal fired eight shots, in a large foyer, at a high school prayer group as it was breaking up. Firing at a milling, screaming, running group, he hit eight different kids with eight shots, five of them head shots and the other three upper torso. I trained the Texas Rangers, the California Highway Patrol, and a battalion of U.S. Army Green Berets. When I told them of Carneal's accuracy, they were stunned. Nowhere in the annals of military or law enforcement history can I find an equivalent "achievement."

Where does a 14-year-old boy who never fired a gun before get this "skill?" Video games. He came from a well-to-do family, and had all the access to arcade quality, point-and-shoot video games that any kid could possibly want. A hundred things can persuade someone to WANT to take a gun and go kill, but only one thing makes him ABLE to kill: practice, practice, practice. Not practice shooting bullseyes or deer, but practice shooting people. All witness statements claim that Michael stood, never moving his feet, holding the gun in two hands, never firing far to the left or right, never far up or down, with a blank look on his face. He was playing a video game, simply shooting everything that popped up on his "screen," just like he had done countless THOUSANDS of times before. As an aside, it is interesting to note that it is not natural to fire at each target only once (the norm is to fire until the target drops) but what most video games teach you is to only shoot once, since the target will always drop after being hit. Many of the games give extra credit for. . .head shots.

Is media violence really so harmful? Are these video games really dangerous? Could they really be partially responsible for these tragic crimes? The U.S. Marine Corps has licensed the game "Doom" to train and prepare their Marines for combat. The U.S. Army has taken the basic "Super Nintendo," replaced the plastic pistol with a plastic M-16 and

modified the software a little. They call it the MACS: Multipurpose Arcade Combat Simulators. When the military uses these “games,” they are combat simulators. When kids use them, they are murder simulators. We have flight simulators that can teach you to fly without ever touching a real aircraft, and we have murder simulators, whose major social characteristic is to teach kids to commit murder.

The gun industry doesn't claim that citizens' right to guns gives them the right to sell guns to children. The gun industry, the tobacco industry, the alcohol industry and the pornography industry all accept restraints and regulations when it comes to selling their products to kids. The violence industry says that they have a constitutional right to teach kids to blow people's heads off, and no one can stop them.

The manufacturers of violence claim that they are driven by the market. “If people didn't buy it, we wouldn't make it.” That is drug dealer logic. Pimp logic. Except that drug dealers and pimps usually don't market to little children. The holders of the public airwaves can and should be held to a higher standard than this. How did we get here? What in the world is going on?

### **A Message from Jonesboro**

I am from Jonesboro, Arkansas. I travel around the world training medical, law enforcement and military personnel about the realities of warfare. I try to make those who carry deadly force keenly aware of the magnitude of the process of killing. Too many law enforcement and military personnel act like “cowboys,” never stopping to think about who they are and what they're called to do. I hope I am able to give them a reality check, so here I am, a world traveler and an expert in the field of “killology,” and the largest school massacre in American history happens in my hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas: the schoolyard shooting deaths of four schoolgirls and a teacher. Ten others were injured, and two boys, ages 11 and 13, are in jail, charged with the murders.

My son goes to one of the middle schools in town, so my aunt in Florida called us that fateful day and asked, “Was that Joe's school?” We said, “We haven't heard about it.” My aunt in Florida knew about it before we did!

We turned on the television and, sure enough, the shootings took place down the road from us but, thank goodness, they weren't in Joe's school. There probably weren't any parents in Jonesboro that night who didn't hug their kids and say, “Thank God it wasn't you,” as they tucked them into bed. There is also a lot of guilt, because you know that a lot of parents in that city couldn't say that that night.

I spent the first three days at Westside Middle School where the shootings took place, working with the counselors, teachers, students, and parents. None of us had ever done anything like this before. I train people how to react to trauma in the military, but how does one do it with kids after a massacre in their school?

I was the lead trainer for the counselors and clergy the night after the shootings, and the following day we debriefed the teachers in groups. Then the counselors and clergy, in conjunction with the teachers, debriefed the students, allowing them to work through everything that had happened. Only people who share trauma together can truly give each other the understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness needed to understand *what* happened, and then they can begin the long process of trying to understand *why* it happened.

## **Virus of violence**

To understand the *why* behind Jonesboro and Springfield and Pearl and Paducah, and all the other outbreaks of this “virus of violence,” we need to first understand the overall magnitude of the problem. The per capita murder rate doubled in this country between 1957—when the FBI started keeping track of the data—and 1992. A fuller picture of the problem, however, is indicated by the rate at which human beings are attempting to kill one another—the aggravated assault rate. That rate in America has gone up from around 60 per 100,000 in 1957 to over 440 per 100,000 by the middle of this decade. As bad as this is, it would be much worse were it not for two major factors.

First is the increase in the imprisonment rate of violent offenders. The prison population in America nearly quadrupled between 1975 and 1992. According to criminologist John J. DiIulio, “dozens of credible empirical analyses . . . leave no doubt that the increased use of prisons averted millions of serious crimes.” If not for our tremendous imprisonment rate (the highest of any industrialized nation in the world), the aggravated assault rate and the murder rate would undoubtedly be even higher.

Second, the murder rate would be much worse if it weren't for new medical technology. According to the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps, a wound that would have killed you nine-out-of-ten times in World War II, you would have survived nine-out-of-ten times in Vietnam. What this means to us is that it is a very conservative statement to say that, if we had a 1940-level medical technology today, the murder level would be ten times higher than it is. The magnitude of the problem has been held down by the development of ever-more sophisticated life saving skills and techniques, such as helicopter medevacs, 911 operators, paramedics, CPR, and trauma centers.

However, the crime rate is still at a phenomenally high level, and this is true not just in America but worldwide. In Canada, according to their Center for Justice, per capita assaults increased almost five-fold between 1964 and 1993, attempted murder increased nearly seven-fold, and murders doubled. Similar trends can be seen in other countries in the per capita violent crime rates reported to Interpol between 1977 and 1993. During this period the assault rate increased nearly five-fold in Norway and Greece, and the murder rate more than tripled in Norway and doubled in Greece. In Australia and New Zealand, the assault rate increased approximately four-fold, and the murder rate nearly doubled in both nations. During the same period the assault rate tripled in Sweden, and approximately doubled in Belgium, Denmark, England-Wales, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Scotland, while all these nations had an associated (but smaller)

increase in murder. (In all of these cases the gap between murders and attempted murders/assaults is a factor of our ever-improving medical technology saving more lives.)

So this virus of violence is occurring worldwide. The explanation for it has to be some new factor that is occurring in all of these countries. There are many, many factors involved, and we should never downplay any of them, for example, the prevalence of guns in our society. The rise in violence is also happening in many nations with draconian gun laws. We should never downplay child abuse, poverty, racism or a thousand things which must be confronted. There is only one new variable, however, that is present in every single one of these countries, bearing the exact same fruit in every case: violence in the media being presented as entertainment for children.

### **Killing unnaturally**

Before retiring from the military, I spent almost a quarter of a century as an Army infantry officer and a psychologist, learning and studying how to enable people to kill. Believe me, we are very good at it. It doesn't come naturally, you have to be taught to kill, and just as the Army enables killing, we are indiscriminately doing the same thing to our kids, but without the safeguards.

After the Jonesboro killings, the head of the American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Juvenile Violence came to town and his primary message was that children don't naturally kill. It is a learned skill, and they learn it from abuse and violence in the home and, most pervasively, from violence as entertainment in television, the movies, and interactive video games.

When considering the violent crime rate it should give us pause to note that there is a built-in aversion to killing one's own kind. I can best illustrate this from drawing on my own work in studying killing in the military.

We all know that you can't have an argument or a discussion with a frightened or angry human being. What has happened to him is that vasoconstriction (narrowing of the blood vessels) has literally closed down the forebrain—that great mass of gray matter which makes you a human being. This forebrain is what distinguishes you from a dog. When those neurons close down, the midbrain takes over and your thought processes and reflexes are indistinguishable from your dog's. If you've ever worked with animals, you have some understanding of what happens to frightened human beings on the battlefield. The battlefield and the realm of violent crime is the realm of midbrain responses.

Within the midbrain there is a powerful, God-given resistance to killing your own kind. Every species, with few exceptions, has a hardwired resistance against killing its own kind in territorial and mating battles. When animals with antlers and horns fight one another, they head butt each other in the most harmless possible fashion, but against any other species they go to the side to gut and gore. Piranha will turn their fangs on anything and everything but they fight one another with flicks of the tail. Rattlesnakes will bite

anything and everything but they wrestle one another. Every species has this hardwired resistance to killing its own kind.

When we human beings are overwhelmed with anger and fear, we slam head-on into that resistance in the midbrain that generally prevents us from killing. Every human being, with the exception of sociopaths—who by definition don't have that resistance—has this innate violence immune system.

What we observe throughout human history is that when humans fight each other, there is a lot of posturing. Adversaries make as loud a noise as possible, puffing themselves up, trying to daunt the enemy. There's a lot of fleeing and submission. The ancient battles were nothing more than great shoving matches. It wasn't until one side or the other turned and ran that the vast majority of the killing happened, and most of that was stabbing people in the back. All of the ancient military historians report that the vast majority of killing happened in the pursuit after one side had fled.

In more modern times, we know that the average firing rate was incredibly low in Civil War battles. Patty Griffith demonstrates that the killing potential of the average Civil War regiment was anywhere from 500 to 1,000 men per minute. The actual killing rate was only one or two men per minute per regiment (*The Battle Tactics of the American Civil War*). At the Battle of Gettysburg, of the 27,000 muskets picked up after the battle from the dead and dying, 90 percent were loaded. This is an anomaly because it took 95 percent of their time to load muskets and only five percent to fire, but even more amazingly, of the thousands of loaded muskets, over half had multiple loads in the barrel.

The reality is that the average man would load his musket and bring it to his shoulder, but at the moment of truth he could not bring himself to kill. He'd be brave, he'd stand shoulder to shoulder, he'd do what he's been trained to do, but he couldn't bring himself to pull the trigger, so he would bring the weapon down and load it again. One weapon was found with 23 loads in the barrel. Of those who did fire, only a tiny percentage fired to hit. The vast majority were firing over the enemy's head.

During World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall had a team of researchers studying what the soldiers did in battle. Marshall had a revolutionary idea: for the first time in human history they asked the individual soldier what he did in battle. What they discovered was that only 15-20 percent of the individual riflemen could bring themselves to fire at an exposed enemy soldier. This was consistently true “whether the action was spread over a day, or two days or three.”

That's the reality of the battlefield. Only a small percentage of soldiers are able and willing to participate. Men are willing to die, they're willing to give themselves as a sacrificial offering for their nation, but they're not willing to kill. It's a phenomenal insight into human nature, but when the military became aware of that, they systematically went about the process of trying to fix this “problem.” From the military perspective a fifteen percent firing rate among riflemen is like a fifteen percent literacy

rate among librarians. And fix it the military did. By the Korean War around 55 percent of the soldiers were willing to fire to kill; by Vietnam, the rate rose to over 90 percent.

## **The methods in this madness**

How the military increases the killing rate of soldiers in combat is instructive because our culture today is doing the same thing to our children, but without the safeguards. The training methods the military uses are desensitization, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and role modeling. I'll explain these in the military context and show how these same factors are contributing to phenomenal increase of violence in our culture.

## **Desensitization**

Desensitization and brutalization happen at boot camp. From the moment you step off the bus, you are physically and verbally abused. Countless pushups, endless hours at attention or running with heavy loads, while carefully trained professionals take turns screaming at you. Your head is shaved, you are herded together naked and dressed alike, losing all vestiges of individuality. This brutalization is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and to force you to accept a new set of values which embrace destruction, violence, and death as a way of life. In the end, you are desensitized to violence and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world.

Something very similar to this desensitization toward violence is happening to our children through violence in the media, but instead of 18-year-olds it begins at the age of 18 months when a child is first able to discern what is happening on television. At that age, children can watch something happening on television and mimic that action. It isn't until they're six or seven years old that the part of the brain kicks in which lets them understand where information comes from. They are developmentally, psychologically, and physically unable to discern the difference between fantasy and reality.

This means that when a young child sees somebody being shot, stabbed, raped, brutalized, degraded, or murdered on TV, to them it is as though it were actually happening. To have a child of three, four, or five watch a "splatter" movie in which he spends 90 minutes learning to relate to a character and then in the last 30 minutes of the movie watch helplessly as his newfound friend is hunted down and brutally murdered, is the moral and psychological equivalent of introducing your child to a friend, letting him play with that friend and then butchering that friend in your living room right front of your child's eyes. This happens to our children hundreds upon hundreds of times throughout their lifetimes.

Sure, they are told: "Hey it was all a joke, it's all for fun. Look, this is not real, it's just TV." They nod their little heads and they say okay, but the reality is that they can't tell the difference. Can you remember a point in your life or in your children's lives when dreams, reality, and television were all jumbled together? That's what it's like to be at a child's level of psychological development. That's what the media do to children.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published the definitive epidemiological study on the impact of TV violence. The research demonstrated what happened in numerous nations after television made its appearance, as compared to nations and regions without TV. The two nations or regions are demographically and ethnically identical: only one variable has been manipulated, the presence of television. In every single case, in the nation, region, or city with television there is an immediate explosion of violence on the playground, and within fifteen years there is a doubling of the murder rate. Why fifteen years? That's how long it takes for the brutalization of a three-to-five-year-old to reach the "prime crime age." That's how long it takes for you to reap what you have sown when you brutalize, traumatize, and desensitize a three year old.

Today, the data that we have linking violence in the media to violence in society is superior to that linking cancer and tobacco. We now have hundreds of sound scientific studies that demonstrate the social impact of this brutalization in the media. The Journal of the American Medical Association, probably the world's most prestigious medical journal, stated in their June 10th, 1992 issue, that "It is concluded that the introduction of television in the 1950's caused a subsequent doubling of the homicide rate, i.e., long-term childhood exposure to television is a causal factor behind approximately one half of the homicides committed in the United States, or approximately 10,000 homicides annually." The article goes on to conclude that "...if, hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, there would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United states, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults."

### **Classical conditioning**

Classical conditioning is the kind of conditioning Pavlov's dog received. Remember, in Psychology 101, how Pavlov's dog learned to associate one thing with another: the ringing of the bell with food? From that point on the dog could not hear the bell without salivating.

The Japanese were masters at using classical conditioning with their soldiers. Early in World War II, Chinese prisoners were placed on their knees in a ditch with their hands bound behind them. One by one, young, unblooded Japanese soldiers had to go into the ditch and bayonet "their" prisoner to death. This is a brutal, horrific way to have to kill another human being. Up on the banks, there was an officer who would shoot the Japanese soldiers if they did not kill. Up on the banks, all of the soldiers' friends would cheer them on in their violence. Afterwards, the soldiers were treated to the best meal they'd had in months, to sake, and to so-called "comfort girls." The result? They learned to associate committing violent acts with pleasure.

This technique is so morally reprehensible that there are very few examples of it in modern U.S. military training, but there are some clear-cut examples of it being done by the media to our children. What is happening to our children is a reverse version of the movie *Clockwork Orange*. In *Clockwork Orange*, a brutal sociopath, a mass murderer, was strapped to a chair and forced to watch violent movies. Unbeknownst to him, a drug

was injected into him that made him nauseous and he sat and gagged and retched as he watched the movies. After hundreds of repetitions of this he began to associate violence with nausea and it limited his ability to engage in violence.

What we are doing is the exact opposite of this: we're having our children watch vivid pictures of human suffering and death and they learn to associate it with what? Their favorite soft drink and candy bar, or their girlfriend's perfume.

After the Jonesboro shootings, one of the high school teachers told me about her students' reaction when she told them that someone had shot a bunch of their little brothers, sisters, and cousins in the middle school. "They laughed," she told me with dismay, "they laughed." A similar reaction happens all the time in movie theaters when there is bloody violence. The young people laugh and cheer and keep right on eating popcorn and drinking pop. We have raised a generation of barbarians who have learned to associate violence with pleasure, like the Romans who cheered and ate snacks as the Christians were slaughtered in the Colosseum.

The result is a phenomenon which functions much like AIDS and is called AVIDS—Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS has never killed anybody. It destroys your immune system and then other diseases that shouldn't kill you become fatal. Television violence by itself doesn't kill anybody. It destroys your violence immune system and conditions you to derive pleasure from violence. To kill another human being you've got to get through two filters. The first filter is the forebrain; a thousand things can convince the forebrain to kill: racism, politics, religion, anger, greed, hatred. Once you're at close range with another human being and it's time for you to pull that trigger, you slam head on into midbrain resistance. That's when this Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome takes over and allows you to kill.

## **Operant conditioning**

The third method the military uses is operant conditioning, a very powerful procedure of stimulus-response, stimulus-response. A benign example of operant conditioning is the use of flight simulators to train pilots. An airline pilot in training sits in front of a flight simulator for endless, mind-numbing hours. When a particular stimulus warning light goes on, he is taught to react in a certain way. When another warning light goes on, a different reaction is necessary. Stimulus-response, stimulus-response, stimulus-response. One day the pilot is actually flying a jumbo jet, the plane is going down, and 300 people are screaming behind him. He's wetting his seat cushion and he's scared out of his wits, but he does the right thing. Why? Because he's been conditioned to respond in a particular way to this crisis situation.

When people are frightened or angry they will do what they have been conditioned to do. We do it with children in fire drills. When the fire alarm is set off, the children learn to file out of the school in orderly fashion. One day there's a real fire and they're frightened out of their wits, but they do exactly what they've been conditioned to do, and it saves their lives.

The military and the law enforcement community have made killing a conditioned response. This has substantially raised the firing rate on the modern battlefield. Whereas target training in World War II used bullseye targets, now soldiers learn to fire at realistic, man-shaped silhouettes that pop up in their field of view. That's the conditioned stimulus. The trainees only have a split second to engage the target. The conditioned response is to shoot the target and then it drops. Stimulus-response, stimulus-response, stimulus-response—soldiers or police officers experience hundreds of repetitions of this. Later, when soldiers are out on the battlefield or police officers are walking a beat and somebody pops up with a gun, reflexively they will shoot and shoot to kill. We know that 75 to 80 percent of the shooting on the modern battlefield is the result of this kind of stimulus-response training.

Now if you're a little troubled by that, how much more should we be troubled by the fact that every time children play interactive point-and-shoot video games, they're learning the exact same conditioned reflex and motor skills.

I was an expert witness in a murder case in South Carolina trying to offer mitigation for a child who was facing the death penalty. We tried to explain to the jury that interactive video games had conditioned this child to shoot a gun to kill. He had put hundreds of dollars into video games learning to point and shoot, point and shoot. One day, he and a buddy of his decided it would be fun to rob the local, country crossroads quickie mart. They walked in and he pointed a snub-nosed .38 pistol at the clerk's head. The clerk turned to look at him, and the defendant shot reflexively from a range of about six feet. The bullet hit the clerk right between the eyes, which is a pretty remarkable shot with that weapon at that range, and killed this father of two children. Afterwards, we asked the boy what happened and why he did it? It clearly was not part of their plan to kill the man—it was being videotaped from six different directions. He said, “I don't know, it was a mistake, it wasn't supposed to happen.”

In the military and law enforcement worlds, the right option often is not to shoot, but you never, never put your quarter in that video machine with the intention of not shooting. There's always some stimulus that sets you off. When this young man was excited, and his heart rate went up, and the vasoconstriction set in, and his forebrain closed down, he did exactly what he was conditioned to do: he reflexively pulled the trigger, shooting and shooting accurately, just like all those times he played video games. This process of stimulus-response is extraordinarily powerful and frightening. The result is ever-more homemade pseudo-sociopaths who kill reflexively and show no remorse. Our children are learning to kill and learning to like it and then we have the audacity to say, “Oh my goodness, what's wrong?”

One of the children allegedly involved in Jonesboro shootings—and they are just children—had a fair amount of experience shooting real guns. The other child was a non-shooter and, to the best of our knowledge, had almost no experience shooting. Between them, those two children fired 27 shots from a range of over 100 yards, and they hit 15 people. That's pretty remarkable shooting. We run into these situations a lot: children

who have never picked up a gun in their lives pick up a real gun and are incredibly accurate and efficient with that gun. Why? Video games.

## **Role modeling**

In the military you are immediately confronted with a role model: your drill sergeant. He personifies violence and aggression. Along with military heroes, these kind of violent role models have always been used to influence young, impressionable minds.

Today, the media are providing our children with role models, and this can be seen not just in the lawless sociopaths in movies and in TV shows, but it can also be seen in the media inspired, copycat aspects of the Jonesboro murders. This is a twist to these juvenile crimes that the TV networks would much rather not talk about.

Research in the 1970's demonstrated the effect of "cluster suicides," in which the local TV reporting of teen suicides was directly responsible for causing numerous copycat suicides of young, impressionable teenagers. Somewhere in every population there are potentially suicidal children who will say to themselves, "Well, I'll show all those people who have been mean to me. I know how to get my picture on TV, too." Because of this research, television stations today generally do not cover suicides, but when the pictures of teenage killers appear on TV, the effect is exactly the same: Somewhere there is a potentially violent little boy who says to himself, "Well, I'll show all those people who have been mean to me. I know how to get my picture on TV, too."

Thus we get the effect of copycat cluster murders that work their way across America like a virus spread by the six o'clock local news. No matter what people have done, if you put their picture on TV, you have made them celebrities and someone, somewhere, will emulate them.

The copycat lineage of the Jonesboro shootings can first be picked up at Pearl, Mississippi, less than six months before the Jonesboro shootings. In Pearl, a 16-year-old boy was accused of killing his mother and then going to his school and shooting nine students, two of whom died, including his ex-girlfriend. Two months later this virus spread to Paducah, Kentucky, where a 14-year-old boy was arrested for killing three students and wounding five others.

A very important step in the spread of this copycat crime virus occurred in Stamps, Arkansas, 15 days after Pearl and just a little over 90 days before Jonesboro. In Stamps, a 14-year-old boy who was angry at his school mates, hid in the woods and fired at children as they came out of school. Sound familiar? Only two children were injured in this crime, and so most of the world didn't hear about it, but it got great regional coverage on TV, and two little boys in Jonesboro, Arkansas couldn't have helped but hear about it.

Then there was Springfield, Oregon, and so many others. Who is next? Is this a reasonable price to pay for the TV network's "right" to turn juvenile defendants into celebrities and role models by playing up their pictures on TV?

It is vital that our society be informed about these crimes, but when the visual images of the young killers are put in the media, they have just become role models. The average preschooler in America watches 27 hours a week of television. The average child gets more one-on-one communication from the TV than from parents and teachers combined. The ultimate achievement for our children is to get their picture on TV. The solution is simple and it comes straight out of the suicidology literature: the media has every right and responsibility to tell the story, but they have no right to glorify the killers by presenting their visual images on TV.

### **Unlearning violence**

So what is the road home from the dark and lonely place which we have traveled? One route infringes on civil liberties. The city of New York has made some remarkable progress in recent years in bringing down crime rates, but they may very well have done it at the expense of a lot of civil liberties. People who are fearful say that's a price that they are willing to pay.

Another route to traverse would be to "just turn it off," that is, if you don't like what is on television all you have to do is use the "off" button. Yet, every single one of the parents of the 15 shooting victims in Jonesboro could have protected their children from TV violence, and it wouldn't have done a bit of good. Because somewhere there were two little boys whose parents didn't "just turn it off."

On the night of the Jonesboro shootings, clergy and counselors were working in small groups in the hospital waiting room, comforting the groups of relatives and friends of the 15 shooting victims. Then they noticed one woman who had been sitting alone silently.

A counselor went up to the woman and discovered that she was the mother of one of the girls who had been killed. She had no friends, no husband, no family with her as she sat in the hospital, alone and stunned by her loss. "I just came to find out how to get my little girl's body back," she said. But the body had been taken to Little Rock, 100 miles away, for an autopsy. Told this, in her dazed mind her very next concern was, "I just don't know how we're going to pay for the funeral. I don't know how we can afford it." That little girl was truly all she had in all the world. Come to Jonesboro, hunt up this mother, and tell her how she should "Just turn it off."

Another route to take to reduce violence is gun control. I don't want to downplay that option, but I want you to understand the cycle that America is trapped in when we want to talk about gun control. Americans are very much invested in a mentality that doesn't trust the government and believes that every individual should be responsible for taking care of himself and his own family. That's one of our great strengths, but it's also one of our great weaknesses. When the media fosters fear and perpetuates a milieu of violence, Americans say, "I need the tools to be able to deal with that violence," so they arm

themselves. The more guns there are out there, the more violence there is, and the more violence there is, the greater the desire for guns.

We're trapped in this spiral of self-dependence and lack of trust. Real progress will never be made until we reduce this level of fear. As a historian, I tell you it will take decades and maybe even a century before we wean Americans off their guns. The first step is going to be to reduce this level of fear and this level of violent crime. Until we do that, Americans would sooner die than give up their guns.

## **Fighting back**

We need to make progress in the fight against child abuse, racism, and poverty, and in rebuilding our families. No one is denying that the breakdown of the family is a factor, but nations without our divorce rates also are having increases in violence, and research demonstrates that one major source of harm associated with single-parent families occurs when the TV becomes both the nanny and the second parent.

Work is needed in all these areas, but there's a new front—taking on the producers of media violence. Simply put, we ought to work toward legislation which outlaws violent video games for children. There is no constitutional right for a child to play an interactive video game that teaches weapons handling skills or that simulates destruction of creatures who are part of God's handiwork.

The day may also be coming when we should be able to seat juries in America who are willing to confront the networks on the only level they really understand—their wallets. We are very close to being able to do to the networks what is being done to the tobacco industry. As *Time* magazine said in their April 6, 1998 cover story on the Jonesboro shootings: “As for media violence, the debate there is fast approaching the same point that discussions about the health impact of tobacco reached some time ago—it's over. Few researchers bother any longer to dispute that bloodshed on TV and in the movies has an effect on kids who witness it”

Most of all, the American people need to be informed about what is happening. “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free,” Jesus said. Now the truth about which people need to be educated is the message I'd like to give you from Jonesboro: Violence kills. Violence is not a game. It's not fun. It's not something that we do for entertainment.

Every parent in America desperately needs to be warned of the impact of TV and other violent media on children, as we would warn them of some rampant carcinogen. The problem is that our key means of public education in America is the national TV networks using the public airwaves we have licensed to them, and they are stonewalling.

In the days after the Jonesboro shootings, I was interviewed on Canadian national TV, the BBC, and many U.S. and international radio shows and newspapers, but the American television networks simply would not touch this aspect of the story. Never in my

experience as a historian and a psychologist have I seen any institution in America so clearly responsible for so very many deaths, so clearly abusing their publicly licensed authority and power to cover up their guilt.

Time after time, idealistic young network producers contacted me from one of the networks, fascinated by the irony that an expert in the field of violence and aggression was living right here in Jonesboro and was at the school almost from the beginning. Unlike all the other media, these network news stories always died a sudden, silent death when the network's powers-that-be said, "Yeah, we need this story like we need a hole in the head."

Many times since the shooting I have been asked, "Why weren't you on TV talking about the stuff in your book?" Every time my answer had to be, "The TV networks are burying this story. They know they are guilty and they want to delay the inevitable retribution as long as they can."

The folks here in Jonesboro, Arkansas noticed something interesting about the network TV crews that swarmed in like the second of a series of biblical plagues: The networks have blood on their hands, and they know it, yet they dare not admit it.

As an author and expert on killing, I believe I have spoken on the subject at every Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions Club in a 50-mile radius of Jonesboro. So when the plague of satellite dishes descended upon us like huge locusts, many people here were aware of the scientific data linking TV violence and violent crime.

The networks will stick their lenses anywhere and courageously expose anything. Like flies crawling on open wounds, nothing is too private or too shameful for their probing lenses—except themselves, and their share of guilt in the terrible, tragic crime that happened here.

A CBS executive told me his plan. He knows all about the linkage between media and violence. Here's how his own, in-house people have advised him to protect his child from the poison his industry is bringing to America's children: he's not going to expose his child to TV in any way, shape, or form until she's old enough to learn how to read. Then he'll select very carefully what she sees. Now that's a very effective plan. He and his wife plan to send her to a day care center that has no television and then finally he plans to show her age appropriate videos. That should be the bare minimum with your children and grandchildren: show them only "age-appropriate" videos; and think hard about what is "age-appropriate."

The most benign product you're going to get from the networks are 22 minute sitcoms or cartoons providing instant gratification for all of life's problems, interlaced with commercials telling you what a slug you are if you don't ingest the right sugary substances and don't wear the right shoes.

The worst product your child is going to get from the networks is represented by one TV commentator who told me, "Well, we only have one real violent show on our network, and that is 'NYPD,' and I'll admit that that is bad, but it is only one night a week." I

wondered at the time how she would feel if someone said, “Well, I only beat my wife in front of the kids one night a week.” The effect is the same.

“You're not supposed to know who I am!” said NYPD Blue star Kim Delaney, in response to young children who recognized her from her role on that show. According to USA Weekend, she was shocked that underage viewers watch her show, which is rated TV-14 for gruesome crimes, raw language, and explicit sex scenes, but they do watch, don't they?

Education about media and violence does make a difference. I was on a radio call-in show in San Antonio, Texas. A woman called in and said, “I would never have had the courage to do this two years ago, but I was getting the education that you're talking about now, and let me tell you what happened. You tell me if I was right.” And she was right.

She said, “My thirteen-year-old boy spent the night with a neighbor boy. After that night, he started having nightmares. I got him to admit to me what the nightmares were about. While he was at the neighbor's house they watched splatter movies all night long: people cutting people up with chain saws and stuff like that.”

“I called the neighbors and told them 'Listen to me: you are sick people. I couldn't feel any differently about you if you had given my son pornography or if you would have given him alcohol, and I'm not going to have anything further to do with you or your son—and neither is anybody else in this neighborhood, if I have anything to do with it—until you stop what you're doing.’”

That's powerful stuff. That's what you call censure, not censor. All of us ought to have appropriate knowledge and the moral courage to stand up and censure the people around us who think that violence, especially in television and interactive video games, is legitimate entertainment.

There are many things that citizens can do to help our nation out of this situation. Youth activities can provide an alternative to television, and churches can lead the way in providing alternative locations for latch-key kids. Support groups can provide guidance and support to young parents as they strive to raise their kids without the destructive influences of the media. Mentoring programs can pair mature, educated women with young mothers to help them through the preschool ages without having to use the TV as a babysitter. Most of all, the churches can provide the clarion call of decency, love, and peace as an alternative to death and destruction.

*Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is an Army Ranger, a West Point Psychology Professor, and a Professor of Military Science who retired from the U.S. Army in February 1998. He is currently the director of the Killology Research Group in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and has written On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Little, Brown and Co., 1996). His book Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence (co-authored with Gloria DeGaetano) was released in October 1999.*