

The Real Fraud¹

FRAUD in TV is not represented *primarily* by a likeable young college professor who accepted the shabby standards of television producers. Nor is it represented by the producers themselves, who gave answers in advance to quiz contestants and made fools of old-line banking houses by employing distinguished vice-presidents and armed guards to act as sentries over little sealed envelopes. Nor is the fraud represented by the officers of the large networks who waited until the scandal broke all over Page One before coming to life with elaborate policy proclamations designed to protect the public.

No; it is not the quiz shows and everything connected with them that represent the *principal* fraud of American television. The main fraud has to do with the predominant character of American television itself. It is made to appear that television deals primarily in entertainment. It does not. It deals primarily in the exploitation of crime and glamorizing of violence. What is most dangerous about this fraud is that those who are responsible for it profess to see no connection between what they are doing and the staggering prevalence of crime in America, especially among young people. The TV operators make all sorts of claims

about the power of their medium to sell all sorts of goods. They boast about the ease with which they can dominate the fashions of teen-agers just by having TV stars dress in a certain way. Yet they see no cause-and-effect relationship between what they show on the screen and the increasing addiction of young people to cheap violence.

The normal pattern of behavior in television is anti-social. Relationships between people tend to feature trigger tempers and callousness to human hurt. A hero demonstrates his virility by the quickness of his reflexes; that is, by his speed and accuracy in throwing a punch or pumping a bullet into another man's heart. A brawl is not merely common; it is inevitable. To beat up another human being, to smash at his vitals, to mark him—this represents standard operating procedure of the TV exhibitors and is a potent source of infection for the nation.

Nothing is more important in the education of a child than to give him respect for the fragility of human life, and a sensitivity to the precarious balances on which life depends. Along with this goes the need to help a child know how to establish and maintain healthy relationships with other people. The principal effect of television is to cancel out this kind of education and indeed to reverse it. The TV screen thus becomes an arena

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Our country has a long way to go before its national attitudes toward education can compare favorably to those found in the USSR. What would we be able to achieve if it were commonly held that to obtain the highest possible training was a patriotic duty? What would happen to our teacher shortage if the teaching profession were on a par with medicine, and similarly rewarded? What changes would we see in our pupils if we eliminated the concept of individual differences and gave each child the idea and assurance that he could learn all of the material of the basic course of instruction—and then provided the teachers with tools, time, and techniques to assure that the pupils would do so!

These national attitudes prevail in the Soviet Republics. They account in part for the tremendous accomplishments of their educational system in the last 25 years (2). It may be that we must leave to national organizations any program

directed toward effecting a large-scale change in attitudes toward education. The immediate concern within the scope of each individual educator is to look at his own attitudes and those of his pupils so that the classroom atmosphere is such that learning can take place.

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Editorial

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in the home for cheapening human life, and an exercise in human de-sensitization.

The men who govern TV cannot have it both ways. They cannot lay claim to fabulous powers in affecting the sale of merchandise yet disclaim responsibility for affecting easy attitudes towards violence. They cannot obtain free from the American people a broadcasting franchise worth billions of dollars yet feel no special responsibility to uphold the public interest.

Of course there are good things on TV. In fact, the good things are getting better. But the bad things are getting worse, and there are many more of them. For every dramatic production like "The Moon and Sixpence" or an information program like

the Friendly-Murrow production on missiles—tributes to the imagination and capability of television—there are dozens of bang-bang Westerns, rock'em-and-sock'em cheapies and brain-beaters.

No one expects television to become a ponderous, bloated, around-the-clock Sunday sermon. But neither do we expect it to be a mammoth school for sadists. One thing is certain. Increasingly, the connection between the superabundance of glamorized violence programs and the mounting national bill for juvenile delinquency and crime in general will become manifest. The resultant outcry and reaction, official and unofficial, will make the clamor over the quiz shows seem like the gentle sounds of straws in the wind.

—NORMAN COUSINS, *editor*, Saturday Review.

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