

## Book Reviews

# How the media kill!

by Jeffrey Steinberg

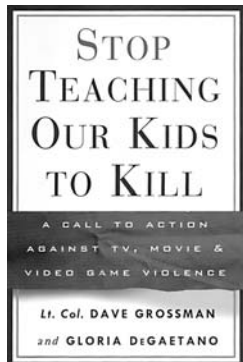
### **Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call To Action Against TV, Movie & Video Game Violence**

by Lt. Col. David Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano  
New York: Crown Publishers, 1999  
196 pages, hardbound, \$20

On Feb. 28, a six-year-old first-grade student at an elementary school near Flint, Michigan shot and killed a classmate in the schoolyard. The boy who did the shooting came from a broken home. His father was in jail, and his mother, a drug addict, had left the boy with an uncle who, according to news reports, ran a crack house, where there were always plenty of handguns. But, when the Genesee County Sheriff and District Attorney interviewed the boy, he cited a number of violent television shows, and expressed no understanding that he had done anything wrong. He had merely copied the actions of numerous “characters” he had seen on the TV screen. Three days later, a 16-year-old girl fatally stabbed a fellow student on a school bus in another part of the Midwest.

These latest incidents underscore that the Littleton, Colorado massacre on April 20, 1999, and the half-dozen other nationally reported instances of mass killings of children by children, have now become everyday occurrences in America.

Despite this, the degree of disassociation displayed by parents, educators, and policymakers regarding this grave national crisis, is a scandal of untoward proportions. Following two weeks of intensive media coverage of the Littleton school massacres last spring, there was absolutely no action taken. Congress did not hold a single day of hearings. The President, after making some initial, sound statements—castigating Hollywood for providing “dependable daily doses of violence” that “desensitize our children to violence, and to its consequences”—fell back on the tired mantra that the solu-



tion to the epidemic of youth violence is gun control. In less than a month, the nation, for the most part, went back to sleep, only to be once again shocked by another surge in “the new violence.”

Fortunately, there are a handful of experts who see clearly through the fog of Hollywood propaganda, and who have pinpointed the actual causes and scale of this new American tragedy. One of the most valuable books to appear on what is being done to America’s children is *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*, by Lt. Col. David Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano.

Colonel Grossman is perhaps America’s leading expert on the rampant abuse of behavior modification techniques in military and police training, and in the burgeoning violent video-game industry, targetted at our nation’s most vulnerable citizens, our youth. His earlier book, *On Killing*, provided an in-depth historical and analytical account of the devastating consequences of the use of aversive conditioning and other mind-control methods, in training soldiers and police officers to overcome their aversion to killing human beings.

Grossman’s writings provide as crucial an insight into the escalating pattern of police abuse of “shoot-to-kill,” as they do into the “Manchurian children” phenomena (see Dennis Speed’s article in this issue on the Amadou Diallo case).

Coincidentally, Colonel Grossman lives in Jonesboro, Arkansas, the scene of one of the first of the schoolyard killing sprees by teenage and pre-teen boys. He experienced first hand, the anguish of the community, and had access to a good deal of information about the two boys who, using professional military tactics, carried out the carnage, literally pinning their victims down in a killing field, while they fired a total of 27 rounds, many with deadly accuracy.

As Colonel Grossman noted at the outset of his current contribution, co-authored by another expert in the field, Gloria DeGaetano, “So here I am, an expert in the field of ‘killology,’ as it is referred to, and a school massacre of terrible proportion happens right in my backyard. . . . It was March 24, 1998; a schoolyard shooting that left four girls and a teacher dead. Ten others were injured and two boys, ages eleven and thirteen, were convicted of murder.

“I spent the first three days after the tragedy 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. We all felt that there were lessons to be learned, and perhaps the most important one is this: children do not naturally kill.”

### **How children are transformed into killers**

With that in mind, Colonel Grossman and DeGaetano set out to provide a concise profile of how children are transformed into killers, oblivious to the real-world consequences of their actions. The book is a devastatingly powerful call—a primer for parents, teachers, legislators, and citizens of all stripes—to wake up and realize that a \$10 billion-a-year industry has been created, here in the United States, that is using the most mind-deadening behavior-modification techniques,

to turn our nation's youth into unnatural-born killers.

The authors provide a systematic summary of the evidence that the burgeoning youth violence and brutality is the direct consequence of exposing our children to a daily dose of violence on television, in the movies, and in the video arcades. There is a new epidemic sweeping the country, which Grossman and DeGaetano call "AVIDS"—Acquired Violence Immune System Deficiency Syndrome. This is no cute play on words. The authors document, that exposing children to television, movie, and video violence during the formative years of brain functioning, can cause permanent damage, in the same way that babies born to crack addicts and other drug abusers can be permanently impaired.

The book shows that, since no later than the 1970s, the medical profession has repeatedly, publicly warned, that rampant exposure to media violence destroys cognitive capabilities, desensitizes children to the consequences of their own violent actions, and produces automatic stimulant-response patterns of behavior, often leading to tragic results, such as the recent Flint incident, and the larger body counts at Littleton, Paducah, Jonesboro, Conyers, etc.

### Operant-conditioning techniques

In a particularly powerful chapter, "Feel Something When You Kill," the authors reveal that the very "operant-conditioning techniques" used by the military and police agencies in training their troops to kill without compunction, are the basis for the increasingly lucrative point-and-shoot video-game "industry."

"There are three things you need in order to shoot and kill effectively and efficiently," the authors write. "From a soldier in Vietnam to an eleven-year-old in Jonesboro, anyone who does not have all three will essentially fail in any endeavor to kill. First, you need a gun. Next you need the skill to hit a target with that gun. And finally you need the will to use that gun. The gun, the skill, and the will. Of these three factors, the military knows that the killing simulator takes care of two out of three by nurturing both the skill and the will to kill a fellow human being. Operant conditioning is a very powerful procedure of stimulus-response training, which gives a person the skill to act under stressful conditions."

The authors continue, "Today soldiers learn to fire at realistic, man-shaped silhouettes that pop up in their field of vision. This 'simulated' human being is the conditioning stimulus. The trainee has only 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 and police officers experience hundreds of repetitions of this. Later, when they're out on the battlefield or walking a beat and someone pops up with a gun, reflexively they will shoot, and shoot to kill." The punch line: "Now these simulators are in our homes and arcades—in the form of violent video games! If you don't believe us, you should know that one of the most effective and widely used simulators developed by the United States Army in recent years,

MACS (Multipurpose Arcade Combat Simulator), is nothing more than a modified Super Nintendo game (in fact, it closely resembles the popular game Duck Hunt). . . . The FATS trainer (Fire Arms Training Simulator), used by most law enforcement agencies in this country, is more or less identical to the ultra-violent video arcade game Time Crisis."

The message could not be more straightforward. The authors of the television and movie violence, the designers and peddlers of the violent video games, are brainwashing America's youth into a succession of generations of potential "Manchurian children," programmed to kill, and stripped of any of the cognitive/moral concepts that enable mature adults to distinguish between right and wrong. It were as if a multibillion-dollar industry existed in America today, dedicated to stripping our youth of the idea that man is created in the image of God.

Grossman and DeGaetano conclude with a direct message to parents: Turn off the television, read with your children, develop their cognitive skills, rather than their "killer instincts." And, don't tolerate the media massacres. The authors provide 60 pages of "resource" information: organizations that have produced studies on the violence epidemic; the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the major media agencies behind the child violence; and a list of civic groups that are already engaged in the fight. For parents, teachers, legislators, of all ages, this is a most worthwhile book—a must read!

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