
Interview: Jack Thompson

‘Littleton was our Pearl Harbor in America’s culture war’

On March 24, Jeffrey Steinberg and Dennis Speed interviewed attorney Jack Thompson. Mr. Thompson is the co-counsel in a \$130 million lawsuit against a number of Hollywood movie studios and video-game manufacturers, on behalf of the families of the victims of the Paducah, Kentucky school shootings by 14-year-old Michael Carneal. Mr. Thompson has emerged as a national figure, seeking to expose the role of violence and sex in the media, in producing a generation of “killer kids.”

Steinberg: I want to start out by thanking you for giving us the time today. Perhaps you could begin by telling us about the Paducah suit: how you got involved in it, where it stands right now, and what you hope to accomplish with it?

Thompson: Okay. Let me answer that by telling you a bit about who I am. I’m 48 years of age; I went to Vanderbilt Law School—unfortunately attended there at the same time Al Gore was there, by the way. And I like to tell some people in my speeches or interviews that I would love to sit next to him in class, because he was so inert, I could hang my umbrella on his ear.

I came out of law school pretty much a libertarian on things regarding communication and the idea that pornography, obscenity is a “victimless crime,” if it’s a crime at all, and that surely the First Amendment protects just about all speech—or literally all speech—and communication, and entertainment.

In 1985, roughly, I represented a woman who had been sexually abused, and who herself became an abuser. And the role of obscenity in that abuse convinced me that there can be not only victims of certain entertainment, but also, as I studied it, there are clearly Supreme Court and other legal authority for doing something about such harmful entertainment.

Therefore, taking that change of heart, I went after, in Miami, three shock radio stations in 1987, which resulted in the first Decency Fines ever levied by the FCC. I then went after Two Live Crew, a Miami-based rap group and their album, “As Nasty As They Want To Be,” and was court-appointed *amicus curiae* in their Federal obscenity trial, which by the way was presided over by a Carter-appointed liberal judge. And that resulted in the first verdict in history that a sound recording was obscene, which was later reversed on appeal. And the reversal was affirmed by the Supreme

Court—not that the album wasn’t obscene, but that this idiot sheriff by the name of Nick Navarro in Broward County, did not put on a single bit of evidence as to any of the three prongs of the Obscenity Test under *Miller v. California*. And therefore, that legal precedent was unfortunately overturned by virtue of the fact, not that it wasn’t obscene, but that it wasn’t proven obscene.

Because of that effort, Oliver North asked me in 1992—and this is germane to why I’m talking to you about Paducah—asked me to represent his Freedom Alliance at the 1992 Time-Warner shareholders’ meeting in Beverly Hills. And the issue of the day was whether or not Time-Warner should pull the song “Cop Killer” off store shelves worldwide, under what was then an ongoing police boycott, and boycott by others of Time-Warner products. Charlton Heston spoke right before I did, and was masterful.

And I said to Time-Warner shareholders, “Eventually parents will sue you and other people in the entertainment industry for harm done to their children, incited by and encouraged by and enabled by your products.” And the hall was filled with laughter. But I must say, they ain’t laughing now. And the reason they aren’t, is that, in March of last year, the United States Supreme Court gave the green light to the “Natural Born Killers” case in Louisiana, in which a quadriplegic—rendered quadriplegic—brought a lawsuit against Time-Warner and the makers of “Natural Born Killers,” alleging that the perpetrators who shot her, were incited to do so by that movie. Particularly encouraging in that causation argument, was the fact that Oliver Stone, at the first public screening of the movie, came out and said: “This movie is great. It makes you want to go out and kill someone.”

We were preparing our lawsuit in Paducah before that opinion came down. And the reason I got involved in the Paducah case is that, I saw an AP story sometime after the Jonesboro shootings, in which a Debby Pelly, a teacher at that high school—or middle school in Jonesboro, testified to Congress that there was a rap music component of the motivation of the two shooters in Jonesboro.

That being my history on identifying sociopathic behaviors encouraged by certain musical entertainment, I contacted the people around the Jonesboro situation, and spoke with a wonderful lady by the name of Judy Furr who had in effect become an *ad hoc* spokesperson for the bereaved families

in Jonesboro.

And she told me: “You know, you have quite an interest in this. You need to talk to a man by the name of Lt. Col. David Grossman,” who was living, as you know, in Jonesboro at the time.

He and I talked, found ourselves to be kindred spirits on the idea that something should be done about this type of crap. And, he told me about Paducah; and that he felt it was a stunning fact-pattern to prove causation. And I have to admit, when he told me about what Carneal did, I didn’t believe it. I said, “No one has that type of shooting acumen, and no one can get that type of shooting acumen, if it does exist, from a video game.”

So, I contacted Mike Breen, who I found out to be the attorney for the families up there, with only one thought in mind. And that was, to be a fact witness in the case, as to what I had warned Time-Warner about, since one of their products, “The Basketball Diaries,” is part of the motivation here.

So, one thing led to another, and Mike Breen asked me to be co-counsel, which I am. And my emphasis in this, has been to try to raise money for our prosecution of this plaintiff’s case, and also to be, in effect, an interface with people like you, and others, about the role of entertainment in these socio-pathic behaviors.

That I think is a pretty good sketch of why I’m in the case.

Steinberg: Could you give us a status of where that case stands now and what your perspective is on where it’s going to go?

Thompson: Sure. By Christmas of last year, the motions to dismiss had been filed, briefed, and we had responded thereto, and they had replied to our response.

The judge has not yet ruled.

I would wager, given the judge’s mind-set, that he shared with us, that the case will be dismissed. That’s, in a sense, fine, because we knew there would be an appeal in this case. And if we are the ones who have to take the appeal—and I’d bet you dollars to donuts that we will be dismissed—we will appeal it. And I would predict we’ll prevail, because we have the case law, as well as the facts, as well as the hard science—not junk science—to prove that we have a case sufficient to make discovery; and when we make discovery, we will be able to prove what, of all people the President of the United States, has identified, and has ordered an investigation of by the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] and the DOJ [Department of Justice], and that is: The marketing of adult entertainment products, which glorify violence, which are marketed to and designed for children—and that is our Constitutional legal hook, that I want to make very clear in this interview. And it’s this. (And we’ve got case law to support this, and we’ve brought on board David Strauss of the University of Chicago School of Law, who is a colleague to Cass Sunstein, who’s known to be a—both of them—to be Constitutional scholars of the highest order, Cass Sunstein being a bit more

visible and widely published.) But the two of them agree with this: If you make a product that by its nature is for adults, and which you label as appropriate only for adults, then if you can be shown to have made it for children, that you have marketed it to minors, then you have wiped away, by that fraudulent design and marketing practice, any First Amendment protection you would have, that would otherwise attach to the making of and marketing of your product to adults.

It is akin to the subterfuges engaged in by big tobacco in marketing through Joe Camel, allegedly, and other mechanisms, adult tobacco products to children. And that’s what the FTC investigation is going to find, which will probably be timed to hit right when Al Gore needs a bump in the polls, and that is, in my opinion, what this study is about, as to its motivation.

Because, may I parenthetically say, if the President really wanted to do something about point-and-shoot video games, all he has to do is pick up the phone and direct the Product Safety Commission to ban them, because they are dangerous. They are a dangerous product—more dangerous than the Pokémon balls, that were handed out at Burger King. These are murder simulators that are training, demonstrably, teenage boys to kill classmates and teachers, and God knows who else.

So that if the President wanted to do something—and he knows that these are marketed to kids and sold to kids, clearly, and they’re labelled as “M”—“Doom” and “Quake” and other point-and-shoot games—as inappropriate for minors. He could do that. But he wants to have a study, which Al Gore can hold up in the midst of a Presidential campaign, and show, that these folks supposedly are concerned about this problem. And, because the video-game industry doesn’t give money to anybody, let alone the Democratic Party, they can do that without inconveniencing—the Democrats can—their huge donor base in Hollywood.

And in fact, in our case, the other defendants have isolated the video-game industry defendants from themselves, because they think that’s smart, and also because the products are qualitatively different. You don’t get a skill watching “The Basketball Diaries.” It’s over the line. It’s not First Amendment speech when it’s been targetted to minors, which it has been. But clearly, video games, everybody I think understands, or should, are a qualitatively different product, in part because you hold part of it in your hands.

I don’t want to be—One of the problems with the way my mind works is: I, maybe, instead of going down one bunny trail, notice others as I’m telling you about this. I hope it’s comprehensible, but there are so many tentacles to this thing, it’s hard not to try and touch on lot of things.

Steinberg: Now, both you and Lieutenant Colonel Grossman have described these point-and-shoot video games, as killing simulators. And, I gather this idea of isolating the video-game industry from the other defendants in the case is a reflection of that pro-active aspect. Could you explain this

killing simulator question?

I realize you're an attorney, not necessarily a neurologist. But maybe you could go through what you've come across as the evidence on this for the case?

Thompson: Sure. And by the way, I have a background of about 18 years, doing medical malpractice defense work. So I do have a background, at least as a layman, in medical matters. And I think, thankfully, I have that as a useful tool in this case, which is largely, in some ways, a medical case.

For example, and to answer your question, there's a study out of Harvard, not exactly a right-wing beehive: Their pediatric facility, which maybe leads the nation in pediatric research, is McLean Hospital, which is also affiliated with Massachusetts General. In June of 1998, a study was done by a Dr. Yurgelun Todd. . . . This study exposed a group of adolescents and a group of adults to violent images and emotion-laden images. They hooked them up to MRIs—magnetic resonance imaging devices—and were able to ascertain by the blood flow, where these images were processed in the respective groups' brains.

The adults processed the images in the fore-brain, or the thinking part of the brain, the reasoning part of the brain. The adolescents processed these images in the amygdala, or the seat of emotions of the brain.

The conclusion—and you see where I'm going on this—

the conclusion of the study is, that that is why adolescents act out what they consume that has an emotional component to it, in entertainment.

I'll make an application by extrapolation stronger, but I think fairly, and it's this: If you develop a skill that is wedded to an emotional response to something, if you trigger that emotion, you'd also trigger the skill. When kids are playing these video games, they are feeling fear, they are feeling anger, they are feeling excitement, they're feeling revenge. And, they are developing, when they feel these emotions, which are also neurochemical—they have that component—you trigger those emotions, you trigger what they're doing when they're feeling those emotions. And therefore, I don't think it's a stretch to say—and in time, there will be hard science proving this direct nexus—you are giving teenagers literally an "itchy trigger-finger," so that when they feel a certain emotion, they have a desire to act it out by pulling the trigger of a gun.

And I've maybe skipped one or two steps in the syllogism, but I think you know what I'm saying. And therefore, you're predisposing teenage boys to respond to certain emotional situations, with certain physical responses, triggered, in a sense, by neurobiological hard-wiring, by endorphins or whatever, and this gets into areas I don't feel comfortable, or qualified to talk about. But the reality is, put in more lay terms,

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This is not just greed. This is evil. There are people who are involved in making products like this, in marketing sex, sexual violence and violence generally to children, that know, that what they are doing is evil. . . . And the problem in this country, is we don't think generally that there is such a thing as evil, other than maybe the Dow dropping 200 points.

you're teaching teenagers to deal with their problems by taking a gun to school and using it. And, at the very least, they have skills that are way beyond what even marksmen in police departments have, and what we have, is a bunch of little potential assassins walking around in America now, that are more clearly programmed to kill, than was the "Manchurian Candidate" in that fictional movie.

Steinberg: You mentioned, earlier, another specialist from the University of Illinois, who has also developed other things that go to this question of the addiction that many young people have for these video games: perhaps spending two, three, four hours a day, probably more time on the weekends, just simply going over, and over, and over again, "Doom" and "Quake."

Thompson: Right. I would not use the word "addiction." I understand why you're using it there, and that may be reasonable. But what I would say is this: There is a man by the name of William T. Greenough, University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, who is regularly a nominee for a Nobel Prize in neurobiology. I've had the pleasure of appearing with him in a segment on ABC World News Tonight, and on the Disney-owned Discovery Channel, about his expertise as applied to the Paducah case.

And it's this. That if a human being practices and does something repetitively, a physical act, even as minute as pulling a trigger—moving your trigger-finger on a gun—by those countless repetitions, an individual will re-wire his brain, and grow what are called dendrites, or neuropathways, that literally create wires, metabolic or neurobiological wires, that enable this person to perform this particular physical skill flawlessly, more quickly—and, when it comes to firing a gun—more deadly.

Another analogy would be this, which Dr. Greenough uses, and that is a concert pianist, upon repetition in practicing an intricate concert piece for the piano, is able to, in a high-stress situation, walk out onto a stage, after such practice, and play that music flawlessly, without thinking of a single note: The reason being that, by these dendrites being in place, he can play that music, which, if he were to have to think about it, would get in the way of performing as well as he otherwise could, by virtue of the practice. . . .

So, that is another example of the ways in which such

practice are able to give you skills that are off the scale. That's what we saw in the hallway of Heath High School in Paducah: A child who had never fired a handgun before, who showed shooting acumen that's beyond what we would typically see in any police officers; and that's why, typically now, all the highest graduates from the Naval and Air Force flight schools all played video games. And they developed this hand-eye coordination and made themselves so adroit at flying a plane and firing weapons in a plane, because their brains are re-wired.

Speed: You began to describe Michael Carneal. You also described that when you first heard what Dave Grossman said, you didn't believe it at all.

Thompson: Well, I was very, very skeptical, and of course, that's good, because I'm trained to be skeptical as a lawyer. You know, show me the proof. And the proof was in the police report.

I thought: "Well, here's a guy who is in this world—Lieutenant Colonel Grossman—he has gone through one of these traumas in a school setting. I didn't know Colonel Grossman from Adam. And maybe it was my old libertarian streak coming forward, thinking: you know, this stuff doesn't really affect anybody. And that's the problem we have in America. There are things that are impacting our daily existence, in fact, our very ability to stay alive, that are counterintuitive.

Plus, we don't *want* to believe that we've got a bunch of Manchurian Candidates walking around that are in middle school; because it's frightening. As James Burnham said, I think it was in *The Suicide of the West*, or *The Protracted Conflict*: He said, one reason why we don't deal with the nuclear threat posed to us, in a realistic way, is because it's so horrible to think that it is realistic, that we don't want to think about it.

So it's my job, it's Colonel Grossman's job. And in doing this interview, it's become your job, or it's your role now, to in effect, in a latter-day setting, fulfill what I would call almost a prophetic office, in a Biblical sense. The prophets were not believed, because the horrors that they were predicting—and I say this as a Christian, that's what I am—were so horrible for Israel to think about, that it was easier to kill the prophets—and before that, ignore them—than to deal with the reality

that Israel was going to be dealt with in a horrific way.

And therefore, similarly, I'm surprised when people believe me about this stuff, in a way; because it's horrible to think about.

And yet, what do you do with Littleton?

Speed: Yes, exactly. You used the "counterintuitive," by the way, also in relationship to Michael Carneal's accuracy. Can you describe it, so that our readers will know what you mean by that?

Thompson: Sure. Carneal fired eight rounds with a .22 semi-automatic, which has a nine-round clip. There was one round left in the clip. He fired eight shots. All eight shots were hits: Five were head shots, three were upper torso. All eight were potential kill shots, taken at, I believe, roughly a distance of 25 feet, at moving targets: a near-combat situation, in which kids were scrambling around. And, whereas the marksmanship is itself astounding, what's even more remarkable, in my opinion, is that he fired only one round per person, or target—which is counterintuitive, all of our firearms experts tell us: Because, the tendency, certainly of a novice shooter, is to fire your weapon into one target, until that target falls to the ground. Because you would want to deal with one target, and then make sure that that enemy was on the ground and disabled, and then move on to the next one, so that you aren't simply wounding someone, who can still do harm to you.

So, for whatever reason, our instinct is to deal with one opponent at a time. So, Carneal: Where did he learn this? He learned it in video games, which teach you to shoot one round per fast-moving target, and move on to the next instantly. And, indeed, eyewitnesses to the shooting, said that Carneal stood there, his feet unmoving, his expression totally void. He had a totally flat affect—and as Grossman has explained it, as other witnesses have explained—it was as if he were playing a video game, and just shooting at whatever popped up on his screen. It was not a frenzied, emotional, "take that and die" type of response, it was as if it were a fear-free setting in an arcade.

And, when someone did something, that does not happen in a video game, someone came up alongside him and said, "Michael, drop the gun," he did so instantly, because there was a stimulus foreign to the video-game mentality that interrupted the process; which he responded to by doing what he was commanded to do.

Speed: Let me clarify this: You're saying that as soon as someone said, or addressed him in that way, he simply desisted immediately?

Thompson: That's my understanding. Let me say something, and this is very important. And I want to say this as an aside, because it's important your readers see this.

Rush Limbaugh—two days ago, three days ago—in seeing a wire story about Sabrina Steger's testimony before the United States Senate Commerce Committee; Sabrina

Steger is one of the six parents, her daughter Casey was killed in Paducah. She testified to Senator Brownback's committee about, not only the magnitude of the loss of her and the other two daughters—but also, what she knows to be the causal nexus between these video games and the loss of her daughter. And Limbaugh said: "Oh boy! Here we go with blaming entertainment. Here we go with the victimization game. No one's responsible for what they do, and I'm sick and tired of it."

Well, I sent off a letter to Limbaugh, and said to him what I'll say to your readers now: Sabrina Steger and the other parents worked very hard to get Michael Carneal put away for 25 years. Why? Because he is criminally, morally, in every sense, responsible for what he did, because he, as a free moral agent, entered into this world of evil and consumed it, and was consumed by it, which does not get him off the hook for the responsibility of what he did, and what he *knew* he did.

And indeed, he was examined in the criminal proceeding by Dr. Diane Schetky, a forensic pediatric psychiatrist, world-renowned as such, trained at Yale, with an expertise in teen homicide. She concluded Carneal was sane at the time of trial, that he was sane at the time of the commission of the crime, that he knew he was doing what he was doing.

And in fact, she was hired by the parents to determine that he was mentally ill at some point. She said, "Sorry, he knew what he was doing."

But she concluded he was influenced by three categories of entertainment products, from which he received motivation and which he received hero-modelling, which he copycatted.

So, what I would say, and did say to Rush Limbaugh, and I would say to your readers: This is not some ploy by the parents of the victims to say that somehow the perpetrator is not responsible for what he did. What we are saying, is: Let's be consistent about the application of responsibility, and therefore accountability, when members of society act irresponsibly and violate their duties to one another. For example: If a corporation makes a product that they can foresee will engender this type of behavior, and they say it's for adults, and label it as such, and yet market it to, and design it for children, that they have breached their duty to third parties, who may be harmed by those children—just as I warned Time-Warner, eventually, this would happen—and therefore, that is taking responsibility, and applying it across the board. There is, within the conservative movement, this libertarian strain of thought that thinks that the marketplace should be the determiner and arbiter of all things. And that's, in my thinking, one of the fights going on within the Republican Party; and it is whether or not we allow people in entertainment and other industries, be it drug-making, or whatever, to do whatever they want, and let the marketplace sort it out.

Or, we use what are the levers of government, legitimately so, to identify people that are public enemies, and at least ostracize them in the public mind-set, just as the Greeks removed public enemies to the east of Athens or to the *Ostra*.

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MASSACRE AT Columbine High

On Tuesday, April 20, 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold launched a military-like attack inside Columbine High School of Littleton, Colo., killing 13 and injuring more than 20 before taking their own lives. It was the worst incident of student violence in U.S. history and a news story that has riveted world attention. This page is an index to APBNews.com's ongoing comprehensive coverage of the massacre and its aftermath.

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With the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, "a line was crossed," says Thompson. "Littleton ended the debate about whether or not we're in a culture war."

In some ways, that's what our lawsuit is about. It is, at least, to identify people that are abusing the free-market system to work mayhem. And may I say, everyone has understood, except the wise-guys who are neo-conservatives, like Rush Limbaugh, that one of the adjuncts to the free-market system, is that there's always accountability for, and should be, for the making of products that are inherently unsafe. If you make a car that flips over at 50 miles an hour, like a Corvair, and *know* that it does, and don't do anything about it, then you should, of course, be held accountable for that negligent behavior.

Steinberg: Parenthetically, we have, as I understand it, cases in the city of Chicago and in the state of Texas, where government agencies actually gave tax breaks and other subsidies, to encourage these video-game manufacturers to keep their doors open and stay as local industries.

Thompson: I have said, on the Fox News Channel, that someone needs to ask George Bush the following question: If you are a conservative, and if you're concerned about school violence, then why is it that Id Software has operated out of Dallas, Texas, unimpeded by you, during your term as governor? And why did you (and I don't have the bill number

in front of me) sign a tax break to high-tech software and other companies in Texas, without exempting from that tax break people like Id Software, who are engaged in these deceptive marketing practices, and who are creating school shooting situations?

There's an ideological reason, I guess, why George Bush hasn't done that, and that is, he has said and made fun of Robert Bork, and said, "We are not slouching towards Gomorrah," and that there is no culture war in America, and that we don't have a problem.

And there's another reason, and that is, that George Bush will apparently take money from anybody. And he is so closely wedded to corporate interests, whether they be donors or just corporate America, that he can't bring himself to see that people are abusing the free-enterprise process in a way that's resulting in mayhem.

Speed: I have a background question. You have been obviously in touch with, or have had to observe and investigate a bit, the entertainment industry. We're talking Time-Warner, we're talking about the various video games, and so forth. And obviously, we know that, not

only are they making hundreds of billions now, but you've got all these spin-offs. For example, the famous case of Death Row Records, in the case of the "gangsta rap" business.

One of the things that goes on, and people often complain about it, particularly if you talk to people in the African-American community, is, they feel themselves to be under a kind of culture assault. Then what happens is, when they go after it, they are told not only that it is freedom of speech, but the problem involved is: "Well, you know, people are buying these things, and if people didn't want them, they wouldn't buy them."

And the further you investigate, you find that the amounts of money and the way in which the money often is being directed through these products—sometimes it's laundered, sometimes you have other kinds of illegal activity that surrounds everything from the concerts that go on, and so forth. This is more in the area of music.

But, number one: What's been your experience, or how would you assess the character of this industry?

Two: Have you picked up strands of what we would refer to as either organized-crime, or a sort of criminal activity or behavior around these industries?

And three: Has anybody else been able to do anything to

This guy stood up, and he said, “You know, if you lose a child, it really doesn’t matter what the crime statistics are.” Everybody understands that their child, in any level of school, regardless of age, is at greater risk now, than they were 20 years ago from this type of entertainment.

roll this back? Of course, you talked already about your suit.

Thompson: Well, you’ve got groups like the American Family Association and other people of good will, in my opinion, who first of all recognize there is a culture war. You’ve got people like Pat Buchanan, who talked about it, and supposedly hurt George Bush’s Presidential bids by addressing it. And, of course, when he gave that speech about the culture war, Buchanan got a huge bump upwards in the polls.

You’ve got some people around the country who understand what I would describe as the following: There is not just a problem in Hollywood and the entertainment industry generally with greed. This is not just greed. This is evil. There are people who are involved in making products like this, in marketing sex, sexual violence, and violence generally to children, that know, that what they are doing is evil. And they set out to commit evil. And, as Edmund Burke said, all that’s necessary for evil to triumph, is for good men to do nothing.

And the problem in this country, is, that number one, we don’t think generally that there is such a thing as evil, other than maybe the Dow dropping 200 points. And that therefore, if you don’t recognize that there is—and again, forgive me, but I am a Christian. I bring this type of analysis, but you don’t have to be a Christian to make this analysis: If you are not willing to recognize that there is such a thing as evil, then you would have no reason to fight against it. But, these people: There is an ideological and—some would say, and I would say—spiritual component to this controversy. And until Americans recognize that these people are up to no good, and in fact, are up to harm and evil, then the nature of the struggle will not be known to them, and they won’t know how to fight it.

This is not just about money. It’s about a certain worldview. It’s about a view of human nature. It’s about a view of what the role of man in society and in the world ought to be, that motivates me, and that in my opinion, motivates the other side. And, this is a war.

And the reason why I have, I guess, been somewhat successful, and also been targeted for harm by the other side, is that I don’t see this as a war of words.

You know, you’ve got people like Bill Bennett, who calls a press conference, and says, “You know, these people are doing such-and-such,” and “tut, tut, tut,” and in a way, Al Franken is correct in calling him “the nation’s scold,” because he just wants to talk about it, and say this is bad what

they’re doing.

My methodology has been to try to hurt these people, and stop them, in what they’re doing, because, sometimes, talking just doesn’t get at it. That’s how I’ve always felt about it.

And may I quote Stephen Vincent Benet. I addressed the [American Bar Association] ABA’s tort and insurance practice section in San Francisco about two months ago, and I quoted Stephen Vincent Benet, who said: “Some men wish evil and accomplish it, but most often, when they work in that machine, just let it happen, somewhere in the wheels. The fault is no decisive, villainous knife, but the dull saw that is the routine mind.”

America’s entertainment industry is full of routine minds, who peddle violence and loveless sex for money, and consider themselves above the law, not responsible for the harm done to anyone.

So, there are those who know they’re about evil, and the vast majority are simply there as unwitting accomplices to it.

And to me, that frames the issue.

Steinberg: What action do you propose to deal with the video-game industry targeting of children, as the primary market for their “killing simulators”?

Thompson: What I favor, is litigation, for a number of reasons. In the speech to the ABA, I was addressing civil litigation defense lawyers, who would not be predisposed to the idea that a cause of action about *anything* should arise. And yet, more than one of them said to me, a dozen said to me, “We have never heard a speech like that in our lives.” One said, “Whatever position we were in when you started, we were in that same position physically, when you ended.” One woman had to run out of the room, because she was so distraught—again, the James Burnham denial response—she was so distraught upon hearing how dangerous life now is for any child in school, that she couldn’t handle it. She felt physically ill. One ran out, and called Sen. Arlen Specter, who is a friend of hers, and said, “What the hell are you all doing about this!”

And these people were won over, not by my rhetoric, which is minimal, as far as skill, but by the logic of the fact that we have a problem here. And so, these guys believe—these are defense lawyers, paid to analyze why lawsuits shouldn’t be brought—they felt that our lawsuit in Paducah was valid and should be *won*.

And so, the beauty of suing these entertainment people is it doesn't require government to do anything, except make it clear that a Federal or state (more likely to come in the state venues)—that a citizen who is harmed by such products has a cause of action, if it can be proven that there's a direct causal nexus between the product and the copycat crime, and that there is no First Amendment bar, by virtue of, in effect, the marketing of this material to an inappropriate class.

Now when it comes to things like the Palladin books and so forth, nobody believes that that incitement to mayhem is First Amendment speech. So there's really not a First Amendment problem.

Secondly, and most importantly maybe, as far as getting people to sign on to bring these cases, you've got the plaintiffs' bar out there, which will sue anybody for anything! They don't have any problem.

And, you know, God bless 'em, that we need a few hotshot plaintiffs' attorneys, to take a look at these cases, particularly if enabled by state enabling laws to bring such an action, and have them unleashed upon Hollywood. These people are scared poopless, in Hollywood, that one of these lawsuits will survive and get to trial, because they know the game is over, if that happens. And indeed, the insurance industry, *Risk Magazine* (I don't know what issue it is), is reporting that the insurance industry has already created products to insure against cases like ours in Paducah.

Steinberg: I was going to ask you about that: It seems like the logical next step, in terms of the interrelationship between the entertainment industry and the insurance industry.

Thompson: Yeah. See, that's the whole essence of our case. Our case is to create a financial market pressure, within these companies, to stop making these products and targeting them to children, if they're publicly owned, or if they're even privately owned; and therefore create pressure by shareholders to get them to be responsible for financial reasons.

Speed: Besides the Paducah parents, you've also talked to a lot of other parents, and "regular people," as they say. Give me a sense of what their view is, of not just the video games and the killing; but, what's their view of this overall situation? I mean, any community has to be torn apart by the fact that this occurs, and they must talk to people throughout the area.

Thompson: [Former Ronald Reagan speechwriter] Peggy Noonan, I think captured it better than I ever could: Within a week of Littleton, she wrote a guest editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, and she said, with Littleton, a line was crossed. And at that point, Americans everywhere "got it," and that is, that the sewage our children are swimming in is affecting their health and their safety.

And I wrote in the *Denver Post* something that I believe: And that is, that, just as in 1941, a cold-blooded attack ended a debate about whether or not to enter a war, so, too, Littleton ended the debate about whether or not we're in a culture war.

And so, Littleton was our Pearl Harbor of our culture war. And whereas that war has been going on from the other side, what I hear in people, and I've been on maybe 20 college campuses, where students, as well as people in the community come; and it's the best gauge I have, as to where public sentiment is on this issue: They want a war. They're ready. Because Littleton was too much. Littleton grabbed ahold of America by the collar, and said, "We've got a problem." And, as to whether or not teenage crime is up or down, somebody in Upper Michigan said this perfectly at my debate there last week, or this week with Nadine Strassen, who sounds like Rush Limbaugh, on how we can't, we shouldn't do anything. He said, because Nadine Strassen is saying juvenile crime is down, and so forth, and therefore, we don't have a problem. And this guy stood up, and he said, "You know, if you lose a child, it really doesn't matter what the crime statistics are." Everybody understands that their child, in any level of school, regardless of age, is at greater risk now, than they were 20 years ago from this type of entertainment.

And, therefore, we've got to do something, because the peace of mind that is gone, is *itself* worth something. And so they're ready. They're ready to start busting things up, legally and properly, to take these people on, because they realize they've been targets, and they want to fight back.

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