

imagine the world." The United States has the chance once and for all to put an end to injustice, inequality, and war, to "move to a higher ground and dreams of a common humanity."

Loath to confront the reality of empire and its military implications, Greider opts instead for a Great Crusade. Americans will recognize the summons as a familiar one. It was, after all, previous crusades that created our empire and our fortress in the first place.

—Andrew J. Bacevich

MAYHEM:

Violence as Public Entertainment.

By Sissela Bok. Addison-Wesley.

195 pp. \$22

CHANNELING VIOLENCE:

The Economic Market for Violent Television Programming.

By James T. Hamilton. Princeton Univ. Press. 344 pp. \$35

The vice squad on media issues has gone bipartisan. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has joined probusiness conservatives in the effort to ban gambling over the Internet. Bill Moyers and Bill Bennett alike decry ultraviolent movies and music. Republicans and Democrats in Congress unite behind such media cleanup laws as the Television Violence Act of 1990. But it isn't easy for liberals to put themselves on the side of wholesomeness. Some of the strains show through in these two books on media violence.

Bok, a professor of philosophy at Brandeis University and a fellow at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center, considers whether violent entertainment harms viewers and what steps might be taken to rescue the young from such stuff. Not fully a work of social science, though it has the proper trappings, *Mayhem* is not exactly a work of moral philosophy either, though observations by the Greeks and Romans, and by later poets and philosophers, are adduced to suggest what becomes of the human soul when we indulge our appetite for scenes of gore and cruelty. While there is a tepid quality to the exercise, one credits the author's instinct that summarizing the latest research on "the aggressor effect, the victim effect, the bystander effect, and the appetite effect" is somehow insufficient.

Not that the research is devoid of insight. Bok highlights some helpful points, such as

how children are both desensitized and frightened by the violence to which they are exposed from a young age. The statistics on depression and suicide among adolescents and pre-adolescents are grave. She considers the ultimate question—whether dramatized mayhem makes people, especially the impressionable young, commit violent acts—and acknowledges that there is no solid causal evidence, only a correlation.

Bursting with charts, graphs, and regression analyses, *Channeling Violence* would never have made it to 390 pages if the author were as careful about the relationship between violent entertainment and actual violence as Bok is. Hamilton, a Duke University economist, admits that correlation does not prove causation, then proceeds to crunch loads of numbers on the assumption that it does.

Resting his argument on an analogy between media violence and pollution, the author considers suing networks whose violent programs provoke copycat crimes, imposing "violence taxes" on broadcasters, and giving the Federal Communications Commission additional authority to regulate program content. But he pulls back from these ideas, saying that the courts would probably disallow them on First Amendment grounds. Better, in Hamilton's view, are "family hour" rules, program rating systems, and the "V-Chip"—the government-mandated device that will be put in television sets so that parents can filter their children's TV diet.

More libertarian than Hamilton, Bok rules out of bounds any interference with content, even moderate interference (such as "family hour" rules) exerted through laws devised by democratically elected lawmakers.

Instead, she enjoins parents to regulate children's viewing habits. And she too supports the V-Chip, which thus emerges as the liberals' technological magic bullet.

"Technology," Bok writes, "is increasingly coming to the help of those who want to avoid ambush by images and messages they find objectionable." But technology only helps if adults are willing to purchase and use it, a problem that both authors acknowledge. Hamilton calls this a matter of "norm creation"—social science jargon for moral suasion, not a feature of even the handiest of gadgets.

—Lauren Weiner

