

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Media increasingly culpable in juvenile violence dilemma

The news is pouring in from every corner of the country: America's children are more violent than ever.

Once the domain of violent inner-city neighborhoods, juvenile crime has crept into the suburbs, slinked into rural America and slithered in the hallowed hideaways of the nation's most executive communities.

Teenagers and pre-teens in Jonesboro, Ark., Pearl, Miss., Paducah, Ky., and Springfield, Ore., killed teachers and peers with semi-automatic efficiency.

Two Chicago youth bludgeoned, suffocated and sexually assaulted a girl in a South Side neighborhood because she refused to give up her bike.

A mob of whites put a black boy in a coma for riding through their Chicago neighborhood.

America continues to swallow its young. And the media — yes the media — is partly to blame.

Television, films, comic books, video games and more are teaching children that violence is an acceptable reaction to pressure, pain, uncertainty and jealousy.

Research shows children are exposed to more than 8,000 murders and 11,000 acts of violence before they reach high school. Magazines like *Soldier of Fortune* and others offer recipes for engaging in warfare.

Books teach them how to make pipe bombs, hunt humans, conduct biological warfare and convert a semi-automatic weapon into a fully-automatic killing machine.

And Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis and other "action heroes" teach them that it's OK to use violence as long as it's for something you believe in.

The old smash-bash shoot-em-ups have been transformed into multimillion-dollar faux Armageddons, replete with vaporizers, planet-shattering bombs, galactic lasers, cataclysmic explosions and all types of otherworldly violence.

Of course the media isn't solely to blame. This generation of children have been burdened with more dysfunctional families, unemployment and underemployment, drugs, gangs and the easy availability of weapons. Many children are growing up already at a disadvantage.

Children are creatures of habit who learn by what they see. If daddy hits mommy and mommy never fights back, a child might begin to think it's OK to use violence. If G.I. Joe, "the Great American Hero," uses violence, it must be OK. If Droopy uses violence to beat up a hulking dragon, it must be fine.

The message gets cemented in a child's head: Violence gets things accomplished. It gets attention, it gets respect from the people in their circle and it gives self-esteem, power, confidence. It also destroys lives.

The V-chip was a start. Hollywood would do well to follow it with more educational programs. If not, Tinseltown may soon reap what it's sowing.

REXRABIN TIMES UNION



Iverson murder shows indifference to Black life

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Q: "Did you ask him why he killed her?"

A: "No."

Q: "The only thing you were curious about was (reference to an explicit sexual act)."

A: "That was the only question I asked."

The "her" referred to is Sherrice Iverson, a 7-year-old, African-American girl who was raped and murdered in a bathroom stall at the Primadonna Casino near Las Vegas on May 25, 1997.

The insensitive, callous words about the victim were not spoken by Jeremy Strohmeyer, the White teen scheduled to go on trial in Las Vegas on Aug. 17 for the murder.

They were spoken by his friend, David Cash, who was present and witnessed at least part of the assault. Cash was not charged in the case.

When Strohmeyer was transported back to Nevada from California to stand trial, deputies said that he was in a jovial mood and appeared to take the matter lightly. Prosecutors reported that two of his friends claimed he used racial epithets in describing the murder to them.

The seeming indifference of two young Whites to the brutal murder of a young African-American girl reminds many Blacks of the horrific courtroom photos of Whites charged with the murder of Blacks in the South, laughing and mugging for the cameras, confident they would be acquitted by all-White juries. It was also a stark reminder

with other crime victims in high profile cases.

— The defense plans to make much of the defendant's "troubled" background to explain the monstrous act. The aim is to create as much empathy and sympathy among the jurors (and the public) as possible to win an acquittal or a reduced sentence.

The murder of Sherrice Iverson is a near textbook example of indifference, insensitivity and disdain toward Black victims, no matter how young and innocent. The message once more for far too many is that Black life is cheap, or worse, expendable.

When Strohmeyer was transported back to Nevada from California to stand trial, deputies said that he was in a jovial mood and appeared to take the matter lightly.

that many Americans still view Black life as insignificant.

The Iverson murder, though heinous and shocking, got a fraction of the hyper-charged media frenzy directed at the cases of JonBenet Ramsey, British au pair Louise Woodward and Melissa Drexler, who abandoned her baby at a teen prom.

Neither did it evoke the national outpouring of rage, grief and sympathy for the victims and their relatives as did the cases of Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson. In addition, it has not sparked angry demands from elected officials for tougher laws on child safety and greater protections for victims of crime.

While Strohmeyer has been

held without bail, and prosecutors will seek the death penalty, the case does not address the following disturbing elements in the way law enforcement and the media have treated the Iverson murder case:

— Although there were lengthy news features detailing the "fractured" life of the defendant and his friends, there were no sympathetic, human interest stories about Iverson's parents and their pain and suffering.

— There is no indication about whether authorities have maintained close contact with Iverson's parents, advising them of on-going developments in the case. This was routinely done with the Goldmans and the Browns and

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