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Frontiersman

Facing the truth, however great the cost.

May 2008

Too Much

Jim Sullivan

Karl Marx got it wrong. "...religion," he wrote in his *Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, "is the opiate of the people,..." However, that isn't correct. At least in

America, sports is the opiate of the people.

You want proof? Just look at a typical community's daily newspaper. Once a week, it has a whole section devoted to faith for its religious readers. That's nice but **every day** the paper publishes a sports section replete with TV and radio sports schedules, final scores of the games played, feature articles on sports (baseball, football, hockey, lacrosse), sportsmen (Barry Bonds and Shaq O'Neal), and women (Venus Williams and Danica Patrick), plus numerous sports action photos, mostly for some reason of pitchers and quarterbacks. Why, in these times of competitive media, would any sane (or insane) editor (discounting atheists and/or sports zealots, of course) go seven days a week with the subject of sports and only one day a week with the subject of religion? The answer is obvious. There's far more interest (and, thus, far more profit) in sports. The same thing is true of other media, too, like radio and TV. Much more time is devoted to sports, especially before and after game analysis — seven days a week — than to religion on Sundays, regardless of the denomination, sect, or cult. Admittedly, some stations and channels are dedicated exclusively to religion, particularly of the Christian variety. However, there's certainly more coverage given to sports. If attendance at church services is compared to attendance at sports arenas, then there isn't any doubt that sports events generally draw a larger crowd. Gate receipts from sports events definitely come out far ahead of collection plate totals from churches.

Sporting events don't have any serious relevance to anyone's life unless, of course, one is participating in the games or gambling on them. Nevertheless, paying attention to sports isn't bad, in and of itself, if it's limited to 15 or 20 minutes per day. Certainly there's little harm in following one's local team or favorite player. However, enough is enough. Several hours a day is just too much time away from the few leisure moments that most people have after their workdays are over. If those all-too-brief minutes are dedicated exclusively to sporting events, then individuals won't have the time to digest the news of the day.

That's a problem. For many people who dabble in it, religion might be an opiate. However, that isn't what dulls the senses of most U.S. citizens. It is sports that keeps the minds of U.S. citizens disengaged from reality, keeps them mentally asleep to what's going on around them, and keeps them oblivious to the larger world out there. Sports keeps U.S. citizens from thinking about what their government officials are doing to them. U.S. citizens are, consequently, in a fog. It can mostly be blamed on their preoccupation with watching sports. That preoccupation keeps U.S. citizens from thinking about what's important.

After all, U.S. citizens have a certain responsibility to pay attention to what's going on around them and all over the globe. The importance of that responsibility is as great as voting, paying taxes, serving in the military, performing public service work, serving on a jury, and all of the rest. So, just start paying more attention to the news, like what's going on in Iraq, in Iran, in North Korea, and in Washington DC. Start discussing it with others and mulling it over. Only then can you become an informed American who can give meaningful guidance to elected politicians and governmental bodies. ∞

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And That's The Way It Was

Sam Aurelius Milam III

I was in college from the summer of 1964 until the summer of 1971. In June of 1969, I married my first wife. As we began to establish our lives as married people, we developed the practice of eating supper during the news. Listening to *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* became one of our important rituals. We routinely ate supper at that time of the day and we routinely watched Walter Cronkite during supper. I don't think that we missed many broadcasts during those early years of our marriage. I still remember our growing skepticism at his daily reports of the casualty figures from the Vietnam War. It usually went something like "5000 North Vietnamese casualties reported today, and 10 American casualties". Even today, I can hear his measured and serious voice giving those unlikely figures. Like many people at that time, we trusted Walter Cronkite but we doubted the statistics.

Walter Cronkite took his job seriously. He wasn't a "personality". He was a reporter and a journalist. He knew how to use the English language correctly and effectively. He gave calm, reasoned, and straightforward presentations of the news. His trademark closing statement at the end of his program was, "and that's the way it is," followed by the date. He was just as serious about that closing statement as he was about the rest of his program.

Only twice during the years that I watched *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* did I ever see him smile on camera. It was during his trademark closing statement that I observed one of those rare smiles. Oddly enough,

The Most Important Question

Author Unknown. Forwarded by BLA, of Schertz, Texas.

During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and breezed through the quiz until I read the last question. The last question was, "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?"

I thought that the question had to be some kind of a joke. I'd seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her 50s. How would I know her name? I handed in

the story that motivated the smile came out of the Vietnam War. It happened one evening when Walter Cronkite reported the story of a draftee who'd served the first half of his tour of duty in Vietnam and then had gone home on leave. When the draftee arrived at home, he announced to his family that he wasn't going to go back. The draftee had a twin who, fearing that his brother would be imprisoned for desertion, volunteered to go back in his place, and that's what happened. The twin reported for duty and served the entire second half of his brother's tour of duty in Vietnam. The substitution wasn't discovered until the twin was being discharged. At some point during that process, somebody realized that the man being discharged wasn't the same man as the one who'd been drafted. One thing led to another and the twin ended up talking to a reporter.

During the interview, somebody asked the twin how he'd managed to serve in Vietnam for so long, without any prior training, and without doing anything that would reveal the substitution. Walter Cronkite quoted the twin's reply, exactly. The twin said, "It was easy. I just ended every sentence with sir, saluted when everybody else did, and acted stupid the rest of the time."

It was the final story of the program that day and Walter Cronkite went directly from the quote to his trademark closing statement. I suppose that the temptation was too much, even for Walter Cronkite. With an unaccustomed emphasis on the word *that's* while saying "and **that's** the way it is", and ever so slightly, Walter Cronkite smiled. ¶

my paper, leaving the last answer blank. However, before the class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

"Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers, you'll meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is to smile and say 'hello.'" I've never forgotten that lesson.

Incidentally, I also learned the cleaning lady's first name. Just for the record, in case anybody's curious, it was Dorothy. ∞

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Exit Wound

Sam Aurelius Milam III

For decades, I've watched the anti-violence people claim that violence on the screen causes violence on the streets. People of a similar ilk complain that scenarios in books cause copycat crimes. My opinion is that such alarmists are, at the best, making silly generalizations. Each individual reacts differently after observing a portrayal of violence. To advocate a universally similar response is, at best, naive.

I've seen many portrayals of violence. Each one affected me differently. *Kung Fu* motivated me to continue my fruitless efforts to become proficient in the martial arts. The miniseries *Amerika* motivated me to continue the pursuit of my political agenda. *The Terminator* caused me to speculate about our developing technologies and has influenced some of my writing. However, I was already studying the martial arts before I saw *Kung Fu*. I was already pursuing the political agenda before I saw the miniseries *Amerika*. I was already thinking for myself and writing before I saw *The Terminator*.

The violence that I saw on the screen didn't motivate me to violence. It addressed motivations that were already present. I believe that if watching violent programming causes a man to commit acts of violence, then he was probably already predisposed to violence. However, imagine someone who isn't predisposed to violence. Suppose that he watches some violent program and, as a consequence of that and of nothing else, he goes out and commits an act of violence. It's obvious that what he watched looked like a rewarding experience. It was presented in such a way as to make it attractive, rather than distressing, to somebody who isn't already predisposed to such behavior. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been motivated to imitate it. If my hypothetical viewer had seen something that distressed him, then he wouldn't have wanted to do it himself.

Most of the violence shown on the screen is sanitized. Guys just keep kicking and punching each other. Blows that should have been lethal or disabling just keep landing. Nobody seems to be seriously injured. In a recent movie I saw the leading character get shot in the chest and then

blown off of a burning dock by a gasoline explosion. A few minutes later, he was back in action. He seemed to be a little stiff and sore. The worst that you're likely to see in such shows is a small amount of blood or maybe some small scrapes and bruises. However, *Star Trek* has to be the all-time worst offender. They have a weapon that can completely vaporize a person, instantly, without even leaving a pile of dust on the floor. No wonder my hypothetical good-guy might possibly suspect that violence is fun. If the victim doesn't shriek in agony or the wall behind him isn't splattered with brain fragments from the exit wound, then it mostly looks like a darned good game of sand-lot football.

There are movies in which wounds are portrayed realistically but those are the movies about which the anti-violence people complain the most. If the anti-violence people believe that violence on the screen motivates violence on the street, then they have it backwards. They need to object to sanitized violence. They should **want** the violence to be graphic. When somebody's shot in the shoulder with a large caliber weapon, then that arm should be raggedly severed. Blood ought to spurt out of the stump. The victim should scream. The mangled arm should flop to the floor. That seems disagreeable? That's the whole point. Violence isn't supposed to look like something that you'd want to go out and do for yourself. It's supposed to be horrible. Otherwise, people like my hypothetical good-guy just might be motivated to buy a shotgun and try it out in the mall some evening. If violence on the screen really does cause violence on the streets, which I doubt, then the anti-violence nitwits have done a greater disservice than they'll ever admit. They shouldn't have objected to realistic violence. They ought to have objected to shows like *Star Trek*, where death is clean and sanitary, where people can be neatly vaporized without so much as a severed, bloody finger ever floating in front of the camera. ¶

The unknown future rolls toward us. I face it for the first time with a sense of hope. Because if a machine, a terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too.

—Sarah Connor
Terminator 2: Judgment Day

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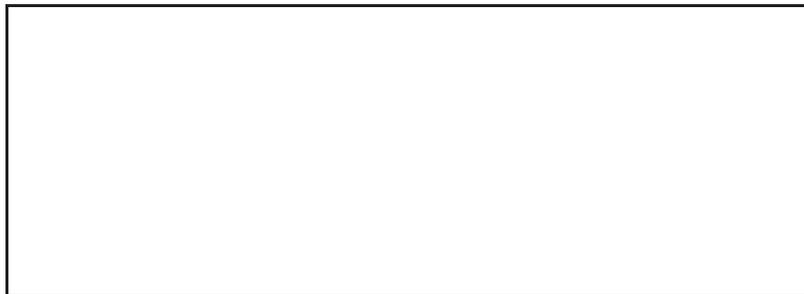


Nation in Distress

A slave mentality exists when security is more important than freedom. Governments encourage this condition.

—August 27, 1976

Milam's Notes



Acknowledgments

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Children's Books Not Recommended by the National Library Association

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by Don G.

- Clifford the Big Dog is Put to Sleep
- Charles Manson Bedtime Stories
- Daddy Loses His Job and Finds the Bottle
- Curious George and the High-Voltage Fence
- Controlling the playground: Respect through Fear ∞

Reasons for Men to be Cheerful

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by Don G.

- Telephone conversations can be completed in 30 seconds flat.
- You know stuff about tanks.
- A five-day vacation requires only one suitcase.
- You can open your own jars.
- You get extra credit for even the slightest act of thoughtfulness.
- If someone forgets to invite you to something, then he can still be your friend.
- Your underwear is \$8.95 for a six-pack.
- Everything on your face stays its original color. ∞

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—Sam Aurelius Milam III, editor

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