

# Artistic Freedom and Social Responsibility

A Report of the Aspen Institute  
Roundtable on Leadership and the Media

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

*Communications and Society Program*  
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*The reader should note that this report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the conference. Unless cited to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the conference.*

# Foreword

With the introduction of each new medium for information and entertainment has come controversy over its use. Optimists have seen new media as an opportunity to raise the cultural and educational levels of the population. Radio could educate the masses, television could educate the children, and cable television could see the rise of a “wired nation” which would include distance education and original cultural programming.

On the other hand, often new media have gained attention and financial impetus by developing content, such as pornography, that was not welcome on the more established media. In addition, as audiences fractionalize and are diverted to more and more media options, programmers in both old and new media have turned to extremes to attract niche audiences—in both high quality and low-brow, sensationalistic programming. The latter has resulted in critics’ complaints that the media are being used for the profane and trivial, debasing cultural mores and squandering potential gains to the populace. Newton Minow’s “vast wasteland” speech to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1961 was perhaps the most famous instance of this critique, but hardly the only one.

However one believes a medium should be programmed, outsiders will often express frustration over how creative decisions are actually made. Especially in the collaborative arts of film, recorded music, television, and videogames, finding the locus of programmatic and artistic decisions can be very difficult. When one searches, often the pea of responsibility is under another shell, whether it is that of the creator, producer, or distributor. This frustrates those who see the huge influence that these media can have on society, particularly on the young.

As one delves into the process, many questions arise: What role is there for personal morals in deciding what is made and placed on the air or in commerce? What does the research tell us about the impact of, say, television programming on the behavior of those who watch, particularly children? What role is appropriate for each person in the program production process, from writer to editor, from financier to producer, from distributor to exhibitor, and from viewer to critic? In the

end, how does one balance the tensions, at any level, between artistic license and social responsibility? And who takes responsibility for what is produced and sold or aired?

## **The Forum**

To address these issues, the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, with the support and collaboration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, convened the 2005 Aspen Institute Roundtable on Leadership in the Media, entitled “Artistic Freedom and Social Responsibility.” This roundtable brought together leaders from the various entertainment industries, government, religious and non-profit communities to address the moral decisions involved in the development and distribution of entertainment programming. The cast included well established practitioners, media critics, an FCC Commissioner soon to become that agency’s chairman, an actor, a Cardinal, a broadcast network head, and the leader of a children’s television advocacy group.

The Roundtable met January 30 - February 1, 2005 in Santa Barbara, situated as it is between the entertainment and videogame capitals of California. Among the background readings, and one of the motivations for the project in the first place, was the article, “What Won’t You Do?” authored by Ken Auletta in *The New Yorker* in 1993, reprinted with permission of the author in the Appendix to this volume. Auletta was the moderator of the Roundtable as well.

What was striking about the dialogue at the Roundtable was the participants’ candor in expressing both aspirations and frustrations in the creative process, and in responding to the criticism coming from all angles. They grappled with the calls for more self-censorship, and the critique that they were not bold enough. They debated the nature of the medium, who had access to what content, and whether broadcasting should be considered by a different legal standard for decency than cable television. And they recounted times when they or their colleagues acted with the highest creative and moral standards and when they thought that the profit motive, and thus the collective voice of the audience, was the most appropriate determinant of what should be aired.

## The Report

As Kathryn Harris's report indicates, the Roundtable participants did not favor government censorship, nor did they expect programming to be made without consideration of the all important profit motive. (The sessions did not try to tackle the issues surrounding public broadcasting.) Rather, after talking through the problems and issues, including recognition of the various arguments regarding obscene and indecent programming, they tended to coalesce around solutions, such as media literacy, which places responsibility on the audience to be informed and critical of what they and their children consume, and on individuals' conscience in the program production cycle.

They were realistic about the nature of the media businesses, the marketplace hunger for audience numbers, and the fickle nature of those audiences. Nevertheless, they also came to the realization that each person in the process has some role and obligation to act morally in the creation, production and distribution of programming. This could take the form of an actor determining what role he or she is willing to play, a writer considering the impact of what will be portrayed on the screen, the production company refusing to finance a debased product, or the media executive recognizing that one may at times have to forego a likely profit because a program does not meet a certain standard of decency.

At the same time, social responsibility should not be seen as solely a negative for programming. As one participant pointed out, it should also mean raising important issues to the public, e.g., telling a story on Rwandan genocide as *Hotel Rwanda* did so well, or creating a videogame that rewards pro-social behavior rather than killing and mayhem.

I should point out that the Report is the interpretation of the rapporteur, who is given leeway in what and how she reports the meeting. Many nuances that participants made during the course of the two day event could not make the page, and no votes were taken. Accordingly, unless specifically quoted, a participant should not be viewed as necessarily agreeing with each point made in the Report, nor do these views necessarily reflect the views of their employers or the sponsor of the Roundtable.

## Acknowledgements

I want to take this opportunity to thank Monsignor Francis J. Maniscalco, Director of the Office of Communications for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for his vision and leadership in designing this Roundtable, and the Conference Communications Committee for supporting it. We also appreciate the work of David Early and Harry Forbes from the USCCB, who participated in the planning stages.

We thank Ken Auletta, who was a Senior Fellow of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program at the time, for moderating the sessions, for suggesting background readings, and for inspiring the Roundtable itself with his *New Yorker* classic, “What Won’t You Do?” (reprinted in the Appendix). Jeff Cole, Director of the Digital Future at the University of Southern California, treated the participants with an informative yet succinct overview of the key trends in the media and a summary of the extensive body of research on the impact of sex and violence in television programming.

Kathryn Harris, our rapporteur, did a superb job in gleaning the important concepts and insights from the dialogue, then contextualizing and organizing them into a coherent whole. And, as usual, I want to acknowledge and thank Tricia Kelly, Assistant Director, and Maria Medrano, Project Manager, Communications and Society Program, for their perseverance and excellence in the selection and editing of the background readings, editing and production of this report, and in coordinating the conference itself.

Charles M. Firestone  
Executive Director  
Communications and Society Program  
The Aspen Institute  
July 2005



**ARTISTIC FREEDOM  
AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

*Kathryn Harris*



# Artistic Freedom and Social Responsibility

*Kathryn Harris*

## Introduction

There's no business like show business. It's subjective, cutthroat, exhilarating, and sometimes inspiring. For Americans, it's a sweet part of the global economy. By itself, the movie business claims a surplus balance of trade with every foreign country. Collectively, the U.S. "copyright" industries earn more international revenues than automobiles, aircraft, or agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Americans even boast of exporting democratic values—including cultural freedom and tolerance of diversity—with news programming, music, and film entertainment.

Yet within our borders there is angst and concern that much in our popular culture has a harmful impact, particularly on children. According to a CBS News/*New York Times* poll conducted in November 2004, 40 percent of adults said they are "very worried" that television, movies, and music are lowering the moral standards of the country. Earlier in the year, a Gallup poll found that 58 percent of adults were personally offended by sexual content and profanity on television, and 61 percent were offended by violence.

Why, then, do violent or sexually provocative themes continue to draw large audiences to movies, television, radio, recorded music, and video games? *CSI*, the graphic crime drama on CBS, is the highest-rated television series this season, and ABC's *Desperate Housewives* is the most-watched new show. If the American audience is conflicted about entertainment, so are the executives who profit from "content" they don't always allow their own children to see.

Do the media shape the audience, or vice versa? Is there a constructive way for advertisers, citizen groups, or government to influence the content creators and distributors? Is it unfair, or even futile, to impose fines for indecent programming on broadcast television or radio, when cable or satellite channels are unfettered and pornography is easily available via the Internet? And in the relentless drive for profits, has "social

responsibility” become a luxury that a dwindling number of media executives believe they can afford?

These topics were discussed at a Roundtable on Leadership and the Media convened by the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program in association with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) from January 30 to February 1, 2005. Twenty-four leaders from the entertainment industry, federal government, faith-based organizations, and consumer advocacy groups met in Santa Barbara, California, to talk about artistic freedom and social responsibility.

Ken Auletta, who has written the “Annals of Communications” column for *The New Yorker* since 1992, and Charles M. Firestone, executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, moderated the discussions. Kathryn Harris, an independent journalist and Bloomberg News contributor, served as rapporteur. This report is an interpretive synthesis of the conference highlights.

## **Artistic Freedom**

Television programs, movies, and video games are created through a collaborative process that is not transparent or easily explained. Responsibilities are not easily pinpointed. In this universe, who are the true artists and how much freedom are they accorded?

Jamie Kellner, ACME Communications chairman and chief executive officer (CEO), maintains that a good writer who has an idea for a show is deserving of the title *artist*. “It’s important to him to tell the story the way he wants to tell it, and he is an artist as far as I’m concerned.”

In contrast, Colin Callender, president of HBO Films, is wary of the word *artist* and the license it connotes. “With all due respect, we need to distinguish between those who really are artists and those who call themselves ‘artist’ but really aren’t. Not everyone’s a Michelangelo,” he said. “I don’t mean to diminish their status, but the reality is, not many of them are actually exploring their art in a way that is really meaningful. There are lots of successful comedy writers, but how many comedies these days still, after all this time, promote racial, sexual, and political stereotypes...not necessarily for the good?” The notion that these writers are artists, Callender said, “leads straight to the next thing: the debate that saying ‘no’ to them is censorship.”

Thus, Callender and Kellner—who for years worked under the same corporate roof at Time Warner Inc.—neatly capture the awe, wariness,

and tensions inherent in the executive's job in entertainment and media. Genuinely respectful of creative talent, the best executives protect, promote, reluctantly veto, or sometimes even apologize for the programming that goes out under their brand name. They are mindful that no single person controls the context in which programming is displayed or consumed. A violent or sexually explicit program that initially airs at 10 p.m. on network television may subsequently air in reruns on a local TV station in the afternoon, when preschoolers are watching. The much-praised dramas and comedies on the HBO pay channels are followed late at night by some prurient programming and sexual "documentaries." (The February/March 2005 schedule included "Real Sex 28: Bedroom Tricks & Treats" and "Atlantic City Hookers: It Ain't E-Z being a Ho.") If some hapless late-night viewers are discomfited, so are some HBO executives. "We carry program advisories," Callender said, though he also noted that there is ongoing debate within the company about "the balance of all of our programming."

Even the cave dwellers must have had their share of provocative storytellers and visual artists; Hollywood in the 21st century is no different. There are writers, producers, and directors who relish testing the limits of perceived public taste or company rules. Writer-producer Steven Bochco has challenged the standard practices of broadcast television for nearly 40 years, co-creating award-winning series such as *Hill Street Blues*, *L.A. Law*, and *Doogie Howser, M.D.* (In that half-hour situation comedy, for example, an episode about the teenage doctor's loss of his virginity broke a television taboo.)

Moderator Ken Auletta recalled Bochco's resolve, expressed in an interview 15 years ago, "to get the F word on network television"—prompting a wry response from Anthony Vinciguerra, Fox Networks Group president and CEO: "He's still working on it."

Kevin Martin, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) commissioner who was named FCC chairman six weeks after the Roundtable, read a quote from *Nip/Tuck* creator Ryan Murphy that was brought to the Commission's attention by the Parents Television Council: "It's tough to get that sexual point of view across on television. Hopefully I have made it possible for somebody on broadcast television to do a rear-entry scene in three years. Maybe that will be my legacy." Vinciguerra, who oversees the FX Cable Channel, which airs *Nip/Tuck*, called the remark "shameful" and noted that Murphy later regretted it.

Yet executives at the conference made clear that they do not believe their personal tastes should dictate the content they produce or distribute. As business leaders, they serve the varied appetites of the mass audience, and many decisions are delegated to managers working more directly with creative talent. The degree of editorial oversight varies by industry, company, and project.

“The creative people give you a script and are given last cut on a movie. The next thing, you have a \$30 million movie in the can which you may disapprove of,” News Corp. Chairman Rupert Murdoch said when Auletta interviewed him, along with other Hollywood decision makers, for a 1993 *New Yorker* article titled “What Won’t They Do?” Auletta’s article, which is reprinted in the appendix to this report, helped spark the idea for the Roundtable in Santa Barbara and was included in the background readings for it.

The real challenge is the nature of the editorial interface between a program’s creator and the company that finances and distributes the product, Callender observed. “The roles rarely exist in an effective way in contrast to the integral role of editors in the print media.”

“The role does exist; in every network it exists,” protested Garth Ancier, the WB Network chairman who twice worked at NBC and was the Fox Broadcasting Company’s first head of programming. Kellner, who steered the launch of Fox Broadcasting Co. in 1986 and co-founded the WB Network in 1993, concurred: “I looked at everything that went out over both those networks as my responsibility.”

### **Coming to Grips with Social Responsibility**

What is social responsibility? Monsignor Francis J. Maniscalco, director of communications of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, recalled what he once told a senior show business executive: “Your industry does not just make profits; it makes society in a very large way.”

There’s no denying the impact of media and performers on popular culture. Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and rap artists transformed the music and dress of their day, helped in no small measure by televised performances.

From its earliest days, television proved its potency in covering news and influencing public opinion. The U.S. Senate censured one of its own, Wisconsin’s Joe McCarthy, in late 1954 after his tactics were fully

exposed to American viewers during ABC's live coverage of McCarthy's hearings on the "Red Influence" in the U.S. Army. Passions were even more aroused by televised images during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the Watergate hearings of 1973, and the attacks on and subsequent collapse of the World Trade towers on September 11, 2001.

Fictionalized dramas on broadcast television also have sparked contemporaneous debate about where the nation is headed and whence it has come. "Roots," with its depiction of slavery's cruelty, became the most-watched dramatic show in TV history, drawing 100 million viewers to the final episode on ABC in 1977. A year later, NBC aired its "Holocaust" miniseries—the first fictional film from Hollywood to depict the physical horror experienced by millions of European Jews. Shortly afterward, more than half the adult population of West Germany watched the film, triggering much public soul-searching in that nation.

Even song-and-dance routines can stir debate, as Elvis Presley proved when he first gyrated his hips and sang on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956—scandalizing some Americans and delighting others. Nearly a half-century later, the briefly exposed breast of singer Janet Jackson during a 2004 Super Bowl halftime performance ignited debate and government action, fueled by technologies developed since Elvis' time. Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction," easily replayed on videotape recorders, digital video recorders, and the Internet, was the most rewatched television segment in TiVo history.

The FCC ultimately levied a fine of \$550,000—the largest amount possible—against Viacom Inc., owner of the MTV and CBS networks that produced and distributed the show to CBS affiliates, including the 20 stations owned by Viacom. In its written rebuke, the FCC said Viacom betrayed its trust not only to the Commission but also to parents "who reasonably assumed that the national network broadcast of a major sporting event on a Sunday evening would not contain offensive sexual material unsuitable for children."<sup>2</sup>

In his role as host and moderator, Charles Firestone of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program asked Roundtable participants to develop a working definition of social responsibility. He proposed a modification of the Hippocratic Oath as a starting point: "First, do no harm, and second, advance the public good."

A gulf soon became evident between the views of the corporate world and those of not-for-profit organizations. Does social responsibility

require an executive “to educate, inspire, and entertain,” as suggested by Harry Forbes, director of the USCCB’s Office for Film and Broadcasting? Or is it “a luxury to be indulged after achieving some level of commercial success,” as Kelly Flock, former CEO of Sony Online Entertainment, bluntly assessed? The corporate veterans told war stories backing Flock’s observation.

William Baker, a former president of Westinghouse Television who now is president and CEO of Thirteen/WNET, reflected on his own experience: “I was a very successful [commercial] television programmer, and I knew that often sex and violence worked, so I used some of that. Sorry to say, but it did work. And then later in my career, when I started winning the awards, I could afford then to make the decisions that were, ‘hey, wait a minute, I don’t think this is right.’”

Norm Pattiz, founder and chairman of Westwood One, a radio syndication company, said, “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’ve sat in a lot of meetings where people who are in charge of programming, affiliate relations, and sales are getting pressured because there’s a quarter coming up and they may not make their numbers. I can tell you that social responsibility plays a very small part in those meetings.”

Rabbi Michael Lerner, co-founder of the grassroots interfaith Tikkun community and editor of *Tikkun* magazine, countered, “That is precisely why we need a new bottom line—so that institutions like the media would be judged efficient, rational, and productive not only to the extent that they maximize money and power but to the extent that they maximize loving and caring, ethical and spiritual and ecological sensitivity, and our capacity to respond to other human beings with a sense of the sacred, and our capacity to respond to the universe with awe and wonder.”

“For the most part, the system is driving hard to do whatever it takes to make a buck,” Baker said, yet “when you get in a business this powerful, where you should be playing is where the rabbi is talking about, not where the bottom line leads.”

Geoff Graber, general manager of Yahoo! Games, said, “I don’t agree with that. I think there is social responsibility here. I think it’s in this room. I think it’s in boardrooms.” Yet Graber also gave voice to the only conclusion that could be drawn from the dialogue: “Each one of us has a different view of what it should be.”



## What They Won't Do

Auletta pressed the entertainment executives to elaborate on their decision-making process, asking—as he did in his 1993 interviews for *The New Yorker*—what they personally would not condone in programming. Many of the executives in 1993 had answered evasively—a point that was not lost on Roundtable participants. “Ken’s article was all about people who disassociate themselves from the products that they create. I think you cannot do that and then expect consumers to be the only line of defense,” said James Steyer, founder and CEO of Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that advocates a uniform rating system for all media.

Some participants remarked on the 1993 stance of Michael Ovitz, who as a talent agent represented Madonna when her controversial book, *Sex*, was published in 1992. The book—sealed when presented for sale in bookstores—featured Madonna’s collection of sexual fantasies. Ovitz “would not allow his teenage kids to read Madonna’s book, but he represented her,” Auletta said.

Although executives were reluctant to postulate in the abstract about what they might not condone in the future, they had no difficulty summoning examples from the past.

Kelly Flock, the former Sony Online executive, said he has rejected video games that were designed primarily to shock. Nonetheless, he opposes government or industry-wide censorship. Flock criticized Electronic Arts (EA) for its decision to destroy the master of an extreme “Thrill Kill” game developed by one of its junior producers. “EA should have released those rights to somebody else, rather than just do a pocket veto and say nobody ever gets to see this any more,” Flock said. “I think in some form it should have been made available to those people that want to consume that kind of game.”

Several participants said they were troubled by promotions of violent or racy television programming that air indiscriminately during hours when children are likely to be watching. The paucity of advisories also was noted. Fox Networks Group’s Anthony Vinciguerra said he is bothered by some cable networks’ failure to advise viewers and cited provocative shows on MTV as an example. At Fox Networks, he said, “our goal is to not surprise people with what we put on the air.”

Promotions can be a nightmare for programmers in any medium if they unwittingly tout risqué material in a family-friendly space. In his

first weekend as general manager of Yahoo! Games, Geoff Graber discovered that a Yahoo website promotion of “The Sims 2,” a popular EA game, was linked to sexually explicit screens. When he clicked on the promotion, Graber said, he saw an art graphic of two girls in lingerie embracing and kissing, with a male lying on a bed watching them. Another screen featured a woman in a bathtub with her body “pixilated,” with a little boy standing at the window looking in. “Guys, this is not okay,” Graber said he told his staff.

In Salt Lake City—home to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—the independently owned NBC television affiliate KSL 5 occasionally declines to air network programming it deems offensive to many local viewers. The station explains its philosophy on its website, and notes that its decisions often have impact. When KSL 5 refused to air “Coupling,” the objections were picked up and discussed elsewhere in the media. In the face of poor ratings, NBC pulled the series after four weeks.

The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit search was another program that KSL 5 station president Bruce Christensen elected not to air. Christensen cautioned, however, that broadcasters cannot program strictly for their own tastes. “When you deal with a program like *Fear Factor*, every one of us is out of the ‘demographic,’” Christensen said. “We don’t like it...but my 25-year-old thinks it’s one of the best shows on television. He loves it. I think he’s nuts, but he loves it.” Nonetheless, Christensen said he believes the program should run at a later hour. Yet scheduling is no longer much of a safeguard. With the explosion of independent TV stations and cable networks, reruns of series that originally air at 10 p.m. are cycled through all parts of the day.

Broadcast networks have other things to worry about. They fear a continuing loss of audience to cable’s original programming, which is unfettered by indecency rules. NBC tells its affiliates, “If we don’t open the doors wider, then all the people who write or produce programs for us simply migrate to cable, where they have no restrictions. Therefore, you guys need to lighten up, and we want fewer complaints from you when we put programs like ‘Kingpin’ or others on the air,” Christensen said.

To many Roundtable participants, however, broadcast television poses fewer hazards than other media—particularly the Internet. “Guys, if you want to spend your time trying to beat on the networks, you’re out of your minds. That’s not your long-term enemy,” warned Jamie Kellner of ACME Communications. Added Geoff Graber, “When we were kids,

the biggest thrill was stealing a magazine from your dad or buying a *Playboy*. Come on. Face it, the Web has got everything.”

## **Taking the Measure of Media Impact**

“I don’t think you can define social responsibility honestly without thinking about it in the context of kids. They spend about 47 hours a week, on average, consuming media,” said Jim Steyer, the Common Sense Media founder who wrote the 2002 book *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media’s Effect on Our Children*.

Americans certainly fret about the media’s potentially harmful impact on young people, and that concern cuts across political party lines. A June 9-10, 1999, CNN/*Time* poll, for example, found Democrats and Republicans equally convinced—at 68 percent each—that “violence in entertainment makes teens act more violently.”

Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich recently cited expert studies as a reason to seek legislation to restrict sales of violent and sexually explicit video game to minors. “Experts have found that exposure to violent video games increases aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors,” the governor declared in a Website letter to Illinois parents at the end of 2004.

There are differing opinions, however. Former Sony Online executive Kelly Flock noted that video games are very prevalent in societies with considerably less teen violence, such as Canada, Japan, and South Korea. Arthur Pober, a senior fellow at the Center for the Digital Future who drew on his 25-year background in child psychology to devise video-game ratings for the Entertainment Software Rating Board, cautioned, “I think it’s very, very critical for people to understand that every child is different”—that video games affect children differently, depending on a multitude of variables.

The Roundtable organizers asked Jeffrey Cole, who joined the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication in 2004, to provide an overview of academic research on media and violence. Cole, who is director of the Annenberg School’s Center for the Digital Future, describes the subject as “the most studied issue in social science.” Best known, he said, are the “linkage” theories of George Gerbner, dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania from 1964 through 1989, whose “Mean World” theory still resonates. Heavy television viewers—particularly

viewers of local news—tend to think the world is more violent than it really is, to the point of feeling a need to protect themselves with watchdogs, burglar alarms, locks, and guns.

In a previous post at the University of California Los Angeles, Cole oversaw a four-year study of television violence with the cooperation of the four major networks. He noted in his historical review that Gerbner, the best-known researcher in the field, had concluded that the contribution of television to the commission of violence is relatively minor—perhaps 5 percent—although a different researcher, Leonard Eron, put the figure at 10 percent.<sup>3</sup> Proponents of a second theory say that individuals may actually learn specific methods of violence from the media and imitate those acts. The “observational learning” theory, Cole said, might apply to New York City “subway vigilante” Bernard Goetz, if he imitated *Death Wish* movie star Charles Bronson in his shooting of four youths in 1984.

A third theory, developed by UCLA professor emeritus Seymour Feshbach, contends that viewers are cleansed of tensions and frustrations by watching aggressive sports or violent acts on television. “At the end, we’re exhausted. We’re actually less likely to commit an act of violence,” Cole said of this “catharsis” hypothesis: “More violence on the screen, less violence in society.” Proponents of this theory cite Japan as proof because its televised violence is more graphic, yet crime is less frequent there than in the United States.

A fourth theory holds that media violence simply reinforces tendencies we already have. Cole said that he personally is most persuaded by this “reinforcement” theory, which was developed by Joseph Klapper, a director of social research at CBS.

Some Roundtable participants said that the media’s impact on political opinion deserves more thoughtful examination. “I don’t want to devalue the significance of the debate around sex and violence, but...it’s an easy distraction from the much more profound and serious issues that the country is facing,” remarked Colin Callender of HBO Films. In Callender’s view, entertainment and media companies should be more socially responsible in the way they help inform the American public in a build-up to war or other public policy decisions.

Garth Ancier of the WB Network said he was troubled by an animated U.S. Army recruiting commercial that aired on MTV because it looked like “a video game version of fighting in Iraq.” The message

appeared to be, “Go do these things for real and not just play them on the game”—which Ancier said he found “much more troubling than whatever *CSI* might do tomorrow night.”

Ultimately, no one disputed the media’s ability to influence individuals of any age. As Monsignor Maniscalco of the USCCB observed, “Talk radio can generate thousands of letters to Congress to get them to make a different decision from the way they were going beforehand.”

### **Does Government Step In?**

Turning from the impact of the media to the role of nonmedia institutions in the creative process, moderator Charlie Firestone of the Aspen Institute asked, “What would you have the government do in this field?”

“The government should stay out of the programming business,” said Jamie Kellner of ACME Communications. “Who in our government is going to make the call? Who will decide when it is artistically acceptable or cheap and nasty?”

Video game veteran and former Sony executive Kelly Flock concurred. On the other hand, several entertainment executives, as well as consumer advocates, spoke in favor of government involvement at different junctures. Most of the business leaders said that Congress and the FCC need to “level the playing field” for the competing media industries, although they offered different notions about how to accomplish that goal. No one suggested that outright censorship is a good idea.

“Americans are in love with choice, and I think religious leaders have to recognize that. We can provide assistance and we can provide help, but ultimately people are going to exercise that choice,” said the Most Reverend Robert Lynch, Bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg and president and chairman of the board of Catholic Relief Services.

Americans do cherish freedom of choice and speech. Yet when pollsters call, an astounding percentage say that the government should pass laws to restrict distribution or even the content of media. These schizophrenic feelings about entertainment are fully evidenced in opinion polls.

Fifty percent of adults said the government should pass laws to limit violence in movies, television, and video games, whereas 46 percent said government should not decide content, according to an NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll in June 1999. That same month, a CNN/*Time* poll reported that 64 percent of adults believed legislation was necessary to restrict teens’ access to entertainment containing violent and sexually

explicit material. When the CNN/*Time* respondents were asked which solution they favored, however, only 25 percent favored legislation; 54 percent preferred parental supervision.

Only 19 percent of the CNN/*Time* respondents said they would favor self-policing by the industry. Yet self-regulation has been the norm for most forms of media since the movie industry adopted rules of conduct in the 1930s to quell outrage after actor Fatty Arbuckle was accused of sexual misconduct (despite the fact that he was cleared by a jury). In 1968 the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) put in place a ratings system that has operated, with relatively few adjustments, for nearly 40 years. More recently, recording music labels and video game producers devised their own ratings; the pay television HBO subsidiary of Time Warner Inc. offers parental advisories about its programs.

Broadcasting, however, became a federally regulated industry early on, when the government stepped in to allocate use of the airwaves and adopted rules affecting ownership and even content. In 1949 the FCC decided that stations had an obligation to air differing views on issues of public importance, leading to the “Fairness Doctrine.” In 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the FCC’s right to enforce its rule, but in a deregulatory sweep the Reagan administration’s FCC dissolved the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, reasoning that diverse opinions would find voice amid hundreds of new TV and radio stations. Deregulation spurred the growth of talk radio.

Norm Pattiz of Westwood One said he often is asked why, as an active Democrat, he doesn’t air liberal talk shows on his radio networks to counter conservative commentators. Pattiz said he hasn’t yet found a liberal Rush Limbaugh, and he tells politicians that they ought to restore some vestige of the Fairness Doctrine if they want more balance.

The FCC has relaxed ownership and other rules in the past decade, but the agency is still charged with enforcing the broadcast indecency law that resulted in Viacom’s fines for Janet Jackson’s Super Bowl mishap and the on-air language of Infinity Radio’s “shock-jock” Howard Stern. These highly publicized incidents called fresh attention to a law that governs only broadcasters—not cable or satellite television. Many broadcasters have been itching to change that situation because 85 percent of the nation watches television via cable or satellite. The rationale for indecency curbs on broadcasters is lost on most consumers who see racier material on adjacent, unregulated channels.

The broadcasters, who have been losing market share to cable TV networks, say they want a level playing field. Yet how would Congress rectify the problem—by repealing the indecency law, or extending it to cable and satellite, as Senate Commerce Committee chairman Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and others advocate? On this issue, as so many others, American opinion is divided. Fifty-five percent of adults polled June 23-27, 2004, by the *Chicago Tribune* said government should restrict violence and sexual content that appears on cable TV.

Auletta also invited discussion of U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings' threat to withhold \$25 million in federal funding if the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) aired a segment of a children's show, "Postcards from Buster," that included a Vermont child with two female parents. Spellings said that many parents would not want their preschoolers exposed to the lifestyles portrayed.

PBS pulled the episode. Did Spellings' complaint have a chilling effect? "Perhaps, yes," said Bill Baker of Thirteen/WNET, who noted that WNET elected to air the episode anyway in its New York market. "The healthy part of this is, it has created some kind of public discussion."

FCC Commissioner Kevin Martin observed that Spellings had simply complained that she did not think the episode was appropriate for government funding. "There's a big distinction between saying we're going to use public resources to support a program and saying that we're going to prohibit people from watching," he said. Martin's comment underscored the general distaste for government censorship.

## **What Role for Organized Religions?**

Perhaps no group was more affected by broadcast deregulation than mainstream religion in the United States. Major networks quit producing the Sunday morning religious programs that once helped TV stations meet the public interest obligations of their FCC licenses. As a result, the perspective of organized religion is largely absent from the major networks' schedules. Some Roundtable participants spoke wistfully about the era of *Look Up and Live*, *Frontiers of Faith*, and CBS's long-running anthology, *Lamp Unto My Feet*—where acclaimed director John Frankenheimer worked early in his career. "These were all programs that were produced in collaboration with the networks and the faith groups that addressed issues that were substantial. They were not trivial," said Wesley "Pat" Pattillo, associate general secretary for com-

munication of the National Council of Churches. Actor Stephen Collins said that when he was a teenager he scoffed at some of the religious programming he saw but now appreciates the early exposure. “It made me stop and think a little bit, that this was important stuff to some people in my culture,” said Collins, who plays the role of Reverend Eric Camden on the WB Network’s *7th Heaven* family drama.

Collins went on to criticize the prevalent assumption in Hollywood that religious and family-oriented programming will not appeal to audiences. He was cautioned by advisers to turn down his lead role on *7th Heaven*, for example. The show has gone on to be the longest-running and most popular show on the WB Network.

Religious programs are still offered to ABC and NBC by the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission, which includes the National Council of Churches, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the USCCB. The decision to air a program is left to the station affiliates, however. (At CBS, the consortium has a consulting arrangement for network-produced programs.) Monsignor Maniscalco, who is president of the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission, described one network’s brush-off when he pressed for more attention: “The answer was, ‘At least we met with you. There are many people we don’t meet with.’”

Noting that some newspapers also have reduced their religion coverage, Bishop Lynch said, “I would also like to say, in fairness to the discussion, that while it used to be freely accessible to us, you can still get on local stations on Sunday morning if you’re willing to pay for it.”

Mainline religions, perhaps spoiled by their previous free access, have not wanted to follow the lead of televangelists who ask viewers to send money to help pay for broadcasts.

“I don’t think we’ll ever return to the days that required religious presentation on television, but there is a fact out there that more people attend worship services every week than all sports events combined,” Pattillo said.

Tapping that audience, however, has proved an elusive goal. Anthony Vinciguerra of Fox Networks said Fox had considered launching a faith-based cable channel. “Everybody was very excited about it,” he said, but on closer inspection Fox feared the channel would attract too few viewers—somewhat analogous to a best-selling religious book that is brought home but not read. “What’s the purpose of being on air if peo-



ple aren't watching, except to say it's on the air?" Vinciguerra asked.

Pat Pattillo said that he would prefer to see moral and religious values expressed through a wide spectrum of programming rather than have "a ghetto network of our own, which only our own would watch."

Edward Murray, president and CEO of Faith & Values Media, described the singular experience of a not-for-profit religious group "operating in a totally for-profit environment." Faith & Values Media, a consortium of 32 Christian and Jewish groups, owns a minority interest in Crown Media and its Hallmark Channel. Faith & Values Media programs nine-and-a-half hours of the cable network's weekly schedule. There is creative tension in the arrangement, Murray said: "Do we become more commercial, or do they become more knowledgeable about what we're trying to do?" By and large, the collaboration has worked, even with trade-offs. Faith & Values Media reduced its hours in exchange for access to primetime and was pushed by Hallmark to air more movies. "The first movie that we made with Hallmark Entertainment with Robbie Halmi ended up to be the highest-rated program ever on the channel," Murray said. "Now what we're worried about is, we're going to have to do all of them like that in order to keep following this parade."

### **What Can They Do?**

Participants shared their ideas for influencing the media in constructive ways. Some proposals were narrowly focused, and some were quite sweeping. Murray urged other faith-based groups to consider working with a responsible corporation like the Hallmark Channel: "There's nothing like getting in a pool and trying to work it out."

Public service announcements could be revived, suggested Ellen McCloskey, director of production with the Catholic Communication Campaign of the USCCB.

Thirteen/WNET president Bill Baker suggested that religious programmers might team with over-the-air broadcasters to program one of the emerging digital TV channels. Cable operators could then be petitioned to provide free retransmission on their systems. "Just use the old technique and humiliate the cable companies into carrying it," Baker said.

The Roundtable participants briefly discussed the clout of advertisers, who can provide—or withhold—vital support from ad-dependent

media. Some advertisers were instrumental in the WB Network's development of family-themed programs such as *The Gilmore Girls*.

The most sweeping measure was proposed by Rabbi Michael Lerner of *Tikkun*, who said there should be consequences for companies that show little regard for social good. Lerner said he does not advocate more government oversight. Instead, he wants periodic reviews of management by juries of ordinary citizens. He said he is pursuing a "social responsibility amendment (SRA) to the U.S. Constitution. The SRA stipulates that corporations would be required to get a new corporate charter once every 10 years, and these would only be granted to corporations that could prove a satisfactory history of social responsibility to a jury of ordinary citizens. This way, we get public oversight, but without relying on easily manipulated government bureaucrats."

James Steyer of Common Sense Media said the country should adopt media literacy programs, to improve critical thinking skills. "Parents have a critical role, but they need a lot of help, they need a lot of information," he said. "There needs to be one simple, uniform rating system." Steyer said he also wants the FCC and government leaders "to hold the industry accountable when excess occurs...even if I don't agree with every single individual decision."

Norm Pattiz of Westwood One said he was impressed by Steyer's work with children but found some of his proposals chilling. "Who is the arbiter of what is social responsibility?" he asked. In his view, "it's the consumer that's driving the ability for commercial operations, especially, to deliver the largest possible audiences." Kelly Flock of Sony Online concurred, saying, "Calm down; these things will work their way out. The market has a way of doing it."

## Conclusion

Although there was wariness, in some quarters, about the adoption of ratings or the Illinois proposal to regulate the sale of video games to minors, the Roundtable participants appeared willing to embrace the notion of "media literacy" and better program descriptions for consumers. "It does seem to me that media literacy is basically the way to go," said Harry Forbes of the USCCB.

Outright censorship was anathema to Roundtable participants. Forbes, whose office reviews movies and television program for moral content for the USCCB, said he believes in a free market. There was no

formal consensus on goals or policy reforms, but the expressed yearning by some participants for a modern Fairness Doctrine was striking and echoed a theme voiced at a 2003 Aspen conference—also in cooperation with the USCCB—attended by journalists and religious leaders.

The Santa Barbara Roundtable concluded on an appreciative note. “I think what I’ve gotten out of this gathering is that those in control of programming are not unthinking, unfeeling people. Everyone’s heart is in the right place,” Forbes said.

Veteran broadcaster Bruce Christensen of KSL 5 mused, “How do we exercise our moral social responsibility *and* make a profit? That seems to me to be the real struggle and dilemma that we face.”

History offers some affirmation that innovative, conscientious business leaders find their opportunities. TV pioneer Leonard Goldenson put ABC on the map by airing all 187 hours of the Army-McCarthy hearing in 1954, while CBS and NBC seldom interrupted their daytime shows. In his 1991 memoir, *Beating the Odds*, Goldenson noted that the fledgling ABC network had no daytime schedule to disrupt, but he also believed the public would see through the senator’s posturing if they had the opportunity. With effort and luck, social responsibility and business goals can converge.

Summarizing Roundtable sentiments, moderator Charles Firestone of the Aspen Institute suggested that the tension between artistic freedom and social responsibility exists at every level of the business, from the creative origins to the production and distribution of the product. Each participant in the process—from writer and actor to network or station executive, from advertiser to parent—has moral as well as economic choices to make. How they exercise those choices is largely within their own prerogatives but will have an effect on the larger society in any event.

## Endnotes

1. Testimony of Jack Valenti, president and chief executive officer of the Motion Picture Association of America, before U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 9, 2004.
2. FCC Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture, file no. EB-04-IH-0011, released September 22, 2004.
3. UCLA Center for Communication Policy, “Historical Background,” UCLA Television Violence Report, 1996.



# APPENDIX

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## WHAT WON'T THEY DO?

*Hollywood decision-makers discuss the social impact of the big screen and the small screen—and where the entertainment industry's responsibilities end.*

BY KEN AULETTA

The producer Lawrence Gordon was convinced that his movie *The Warriors* would be a major success. The research told him. Word of mouth told him. The year was 1979, before Gordon had produced such hits as *Die Hard*, *Predator*, *Field of Dreams*, and *48 Hours*, and he thought that *The Warriors*—a movie about street gangs—was his ticket to producer Heaven. When the movie opened, long lines at theatres across the country seemed to confirm his hopes. But Gordon's euphoria was short-lived. When teenagers left those theatres, violence erupted. In the first week, three killings were linked to the movie. "People went out and pretended they were warriors," Gordon says. He and Paramount recalled the film.

It was certainly a humbling experience for Gordon, who would no doubt prefer to be remembered for *Field of Dreams*. Though Gordon still produces action-adventure movies, when he speaks of the impact of on-screen violence he does not sound, as some others in Hollywood do, like a cigarette manufacturer insisting that there is no conclusive proof that smoking causes cancer. "I'd be lying if I said that people don't imitate what they see on the screen," he said in a recent interview. "I would be a moron to say they don't, because look how dress styles change. We have people who want to look like Julia Roberts and Michelle Pfeiffer and Madonna. Of course we imitate. It would be impossible for me to think they would imitate our dress, our music, our look, but not imitate any of our violence or our other actions."

Compared with our current movies—or TV fare, music, books, or advertisements—Gordon's *The Warriors* was tepid. The average American child, watching around three hours of television a day, has by seventh grade witnessed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence, according to the American Psychological Association. In 1991, the Motion Picture Association of America rated only 16 percent of American movies as fit for kids under thirteen. The irony is that a PG film is more than three times as likely as an R-rated film to gross more than \$100 million at the domestic box office. Twenty-two of the 46 films that did so between 1984 and 1991 were PG rated—yet the percentage of films with a PG rating has dropped, according to the media-research firm Paul Kagan Associates.

If PG movies generally do better at the domestic box office, why are there so many gruesome action-adventure films? Profit is the chief reason. For a blockbuster movie, the studio makes more money from foreign rights, video sales, and rentals than it does from domestic movie theatres. Larry Gordon's *Die Hard 2*, for instance, is expected to gross nearly \$500 million, only a third of that total from domestic theatres. "The action genre travels well around the world," Gordon says. "Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell you a joke, you may not get it, but if a bullet goes through the window we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language."

Of course, another reason for the genre is that America, the country most strongly addicted to the moving image, is perhaps the most violent of Western societies. On average, a violent crime is committed here every 17 seconds. The entertainment industry alone cannot be blamed for this, any more than guns alone, and not the people who pull their triggers, can be blamed for gun-related deaths. But the connections are inescapable. If there were fewer guns, fewer people would be shot to death; if there were fewer violent images, fewer people might be moved to seek violent solutions. Last year, an American Psychological Association report titled "Big World, Small Screen" concluded, "Accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior—that is, heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers. Children and adults who watch a large number of aggressive programs also tend to hold attitudes and values that favor the use of aggression to solve conflicts."



The people who shape our culture are often questioned about their success but rarely about their values, except by the likes of former Vice President Dan Quayle, whom they comfortably flick aside as if he were a flea. Quayle's motives were dismissed as political, but "family values"—as any desperately poor teenage mother trying to raise a couple of kids while battling the influence of the streets and the TV screen knows—are not some right-wing confection. Bill Clinton, in an interview with *TV Guide* that was published just after he was elected president, said he was "mortified" by much of what is created in Hollywood, and he urged the industry to lead in "deglamorizing mindless sex and violence." It can be argued that the entertainment industry as a whole has probably given more thought to the pollution of rivers than it has to the pollution of minds. "They don't even think about what they put in movies," a key figure at one of the six major studios says of his colleagues. "The same people who are so enlightened and socially responsible don't even think about it."

Don't they? And, if they do, what limits do they put on themselves? I interviewed a cross-section of the managers and artists who decide what we watch, asking each of them, "What won't you do?"

RUPERT MURDOCH, who is the chairman of Twentieth Century Fox and owns media properties on four continents, paused a long while before answering my question, his eyes closed. "You wouldn't do anything that you couldn't live with, that would be against your principles," he said, sitting in his office on the Fox lot. "It's a very difficult question if you're a man of conscience," he went on. "If you thought that you were doing something that was having a malevolent effect, as you saw it, on society, you would not do it. We would never do violence such as you see in a Nintendo game. When I see kids playing Nintendo, and they're able to actually get their character on the screen to bite his opponent in the face, that's pretty sick violence. And you watch the kids doing this to each other, and they're yelling and laughing for hours on end. Is it all fantasy, and is it all harmless fantasy? I don't know. There has been violence in movies that we put out. Some of it I dislike.... But is violence justified? Is the violence of 'Lethal Weapon' O.K.? I think so. If it involves personal cruelty, sadism, obviously you would never do that. The trouble is, of course, that you run a studio, and how free are you to make these rules?"

The creative people give you a script and are given last cut on a movie. The next thing, you have a \$30 million movie in the can which you may disapprove of.”

Murdoch’s *Sun*, in London, publishes a photograph of a bare-breasted woman every day, and he regards that as harmless fun, but he was critical of the sexually prurient movie *Basic Instinct*, saying, “I wouldn’t have made that picture. The violence, the homosexuality, the varied aspects that were added just for shock effect—it was a film of no redeeming moral values.” He is nettled that a “generally flattering” article in *The Economist* suggested that his newspapers had contributed to a “coarsening of British public life.”

I asked him if he thought a tabloid TV show like Fox’s much imitated *A Current Affair*—some of whose recent segments have been headlined “Hollywood Sex,” “Topless Haircut,” “Killer Doctor,” “Sexy Calendars,” “Super Bowl Hookers,” “Felony Nannies,” “Teacher Pervert,” and “Sex Addiction”—had had a coarsening influence on American life.

Murdoch acknowledged that the show “got out of control in the early days,” and went on, “Coarsening? I don’t know. If you were to say there had been occasions when *A Current Affair* has treated some subjects sleazily in the past, I’d have to say yes.” He added, “If you want me to get up and defend every film, every program, I won’t do it.”

Such a defense would be hard. Segment titles indicate that, of the 108 half-hour shows of *A Current Affair* between October of last year and February of this, in only less than 10 percent of them did the viewer have to survive without at least one story about sex or violence. John Terenzio, at the time the executive producer for *A Current Affair*—he left his job in March to move to Florida—told me in a separate interview that Fox was planning to clean up the show, so as to attract quality advertisers and respond to research suggesting that some people were tired of gratuitous sex. What wouldn’t Terenzio do? He had been accosted by so many sleazy people who wanted money or publicity or retribution that he seemed to have thought more about the question than many of the people I interviewed. He ticked off a list: He wouldn’t pay a convicted felon when there was a victim of the crime, or if there was a homicide. He wouldn’t invade

the privacy of a child. He wouldn't invade the privacy of an adult to identify someone as being HIV-positive. He wouldn't out a homosexual. He wouldn't "do anything that makes fun of the average guy—like the story I killed about the controversy in a little town in Kentucky over the fact that a guy had followed the local sheriff around and got a picture of him necking with a woman other than his wife."

Murdoch is more concerned about inadvertent censorship occasioned by Hollywood group—think than he is about the issue of government censorship. He sees Hollywood as a town populated by too many insecure, eager-to-please people, who probably spend too much time consulting their psychiatrists. "This town has a very monolithic view of life," he said. "You mention things like family values, and they're terribly suspicious that you're talking sort of religious rules. It really is very hard to have a discussion here with people of a different opinion about things, the way you can in New York." In Hollywood, he said, "certain things are accepted as absolute givens—abortion, gay rights."

How does he reconcile the two Murdochs—the citizen who embraces "family values" with the publisher and programmer who sometimes undermines those values?

"Without being specific or apologizing for anything—I'm sure I've made lots of mistakes in the last 62 years—I'm not going to spend my life looking back," he said.

Referring to Gerald M. Levin, the chief executive officer of Time Warner, he said, "I'm not going to do a Jerry Levin, and say, 'Hey, everything's fine under the First Amendment. We publish anything and anything by everybody.' We don't. We reserve the right to edit. I think you should not give offense to people's religious beliefs. For instance, I hope that our people"—at HarperCollins, the Murdoch-owned book publisher—"would never have published the Salman Rushdie book. It clearly went out of its way to give great offense to a lot of people. Now, obviously, I'm not supporting anyone saying, 'Let's kill him for it,' but I think it went to the point of being an abuse of free speech."

OLIVER STONE, the director of *Wall Street* and *JFK*, is a First Amendment absolutist. He wrestles only briefly with the question “What won’t you do?”

“Off the top of my head, I’d pretty much do anything,” he said at his office, in Santa Monica. “I don’t view ethics from the outside, only from the inside. What you would find shocking I probably would not. For me, it’s a question more of taste.”

For example?

“Lurid, sexual, kinky stuff which I might like privately I don’t necessarily want to do publicly. As Oscar Wilde said, ‘I just don’t subscribe to your bourgeois morality. It bores me.’ You can do anything as long as you do it well. I think Hitler would make a great movie.”

Does he believe, as Bill Clinton does, that Hollywood is too preoccupied with violence and sex?

“That’s an old issue,” Stone said. “I don’t believe that government has the right to legislate art or censor it.” A movie is “a limited art form that sells for \$3.00 to \$7.50 a ticket, and it’s a person’s choice whether to buy it or not,” he went on. “It’s like buying a book. Buying *Ulysses* in 1922 made you commit an illegal action, made you subject to fine and imprisonment. So where is this going to go? Is Tipper Gore going to be our cultural commissar? I resent that. Bill Clinton is talking through his asshole. He’s just catering to the body politic. Nobody’s forcing anybody to go see *Bad Lieutenant*. But thank God that Abel Ferrara made it. It was an act of liberation. As is Madonna’s *Sex* book. She has a perfect right. And if Ice-T wants to say what he wants to say about cops, he’s got a right.”

Since few say that Madonna or Ice-T doesn’t have that right, why does Stone equate criticism with censorship?

“It depends on what form the criticism takes,” he replied. “Aesthetic criticism is fine. If you’re saying, ‘I don’t like the subject matter and I don’t think you have the right to say that,’ you’re engaging in a form of criticism that borders on censorship.”

Does Stone reject the argument that there's too much violence in movies?

"Yes and no," he said. "Yes, there's too much violence when the violence is badly done. I go back to my aesthetic defense. If it's badly done, it becomes obscene. It's not real. If it's well done, it has impact, it has a dramatic point, then it has meaning. It's valid."

Some people—Rupert Murdoch among them—have accused Stone of dishonesty for promulgating conspiracy theories as facts. How does Stone justify putting words in the mouths of famous men, as he does in *JFK*?

"It comes out of a context," Stone said. "If you examine the movie, you'll see that nothing is factually put in. It's surmised. Donald Sutherland describes a scenario: 'This could have happened. And that is possible.' And he lays out a paradigm of possibilities. And you choose. In fact, Lyndon Johnson was quoted in Stanley Karnow's not necessarily great book as saying, 'Just let me get elected, and then you can have your war.'" The quotes from Chief Justice Earl Warren, Stone added, were taken from a transcript of an interview Warren had had with Jack Ruby. "I didn't put anything in Warren's mouth."

But does the movie not put words in people's mouths?

"In the suppositions, I put things in Oswald's mouth," Stone said.

The movie leaves the clear implication that Lyndon Johnson was part of a conspiracy to murder John F. Kennedy. Does Stone think that questioning that implication constitutes "bourgeois morality?"

"It is a restriction, and it is a form of censorship to demand of history a fact-only basis because history is subject to interpretation and reinterpretation," he said. "And the facts are often in dispute."

Stone believes that the movie-ratings system—a voluntary system—amounts to a form of censorship. "There is a natural law of ethics that operates as a money law," he said. "There is an economic ethics where if

you don't make the R rating you get the NC-17, and you get kind of frozen out of the theatre business. They're all afraid of that."

Does Stone oppose any ratings system for movies?

"Oh, yeah," he said. "I think the ratings system is a consumer label that is put on the package to deal with an age-old fear from the 1920s, of Hollywood being satanic and taking over the minds of the young."

THE man who perhaps more than any other is in charge of the minds of the young is Michael Eisner, the chairman of Disney, and he agonizes very little about morality in films. While he has not made many violent movies, he said of studios that do, "It's not a moral issue. I'm glad they do it. It brings people to the movie theatres."

What does Eisner say to Bill Clinton and others who urge Hollywood to tone down the sex and violence, and who quote from more than 3,000 studies showing that television affects the behavior and attitudes of viewers—particularly young viewers?

"There are studies that say the opposite, too," he said. "That it's a release from built-in tension. I do not think the president of the United States has an obligation to encourage censorship. There's nothing wrong with his expressing his opinion. I don't disagree with that."

Why is Eisner raising the spectre of censorship? Even when Quayle criticized *Murphy Brown* last May, he was not advocating censorship.

"The majority of people don't want the government to tell the writers of *Murphy Brown* what to write," Eisner said. "I'll tell you what I am offended by. I'm offended by those who get on a platform and berate Hollywood for violence in the movies, on the one hand, and ignore the proliferation of handguns—something that they could do something about—on the other. That hypocrisy really annoys me."

What about the assertion that people in Hollywood don't think about the social consequences of what they do?

Eisner responded heatedly: "What is Hollywood? I personally think that I'm very responsible. And I think our company is very responsible."

Does Eisner agree with a producer who said he would not allow his ten-year-old to see any of the movies he made?

"I would never make a movie that I would not allow my 10-year-old to go to," he said. "I find that disingenuous. Now, maybe 10 is not the line. Maybe it should be 12 or 13."

Would he encourage a child of 10-or 13-to see Disney's violent and scary *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*?

"To me, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* was a complete fantasy," Eisner said. "It was a fantasy. It ended up being pro-social, in that there was a whole re-look at the question of leaving your children with people who haven't given you decent references. That was a silly movie. A fun movie."

Does Eisner see a distinction between real and cartoon violence?

"I don't think that anybody thinks that movies like *The Terminator* are real," he said. "I'm not sure that they don't relieve pressure more than they create it. I don't know the answer to that. I don't want to sit in judgment. I don't think about it that much." Eisner does get upset, however, "when Hollywood is lumped together in a homogenized group," he said. "I object when they depict everybody as kind of striving for that last dollar. It's very easy to hide your own lack of action by blaming some film producer who's made some action movie that doesn't fulfill all the moral criteria that a perfect society would dictate. That's an easy shot."

THE producer who says he wouldn't let his 10-year-old see any of his movies is Martin Bregman, who has produced such films as *Sea of Love*, *Scarface*, *Serpico*, and *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*. Bregman works in Manhattan, in an office overflowing with movie scripts.

What won't you do?

Bregman looked over at a table beside his desk, where there were photographs of his family, and said, “I have a 10-year-old daughter. She’s never seen any of my movies. I have no complaint with the R rating. I don’t let my kids see any R-rated film.”

Still, Bregman, like many people in the movie business, is torn by contradictory impulses. As a moviemaker, he believes that the voluntary ratings system is a form of censorship. “I don’t like someone telling me what I can say,” he said. As a parent, however, he welcomes it. “If there were no ratings, I’d first have to go see each movie before allowing my daughter to go,” he said.

THERE are people who say that Columbia Pictures’ *Lethal Weapon* was too violent and might have had a bad influence on kids. Mark Canton, who has been the chairman of Columbia since 1991, is not among them. He speaks of his movies as if they were about art—were sweeping narratives with profound messages. “It is true that I would not want to make movies that are so socially irresponsible that they could cause real harm,” he said. “I approach each day by thinking that the art form, that the opportunities that lie within the process of making a movie are almost limitless.... Often, movies anticipate what society is about rather than merely reflect what it’s about. You end up on both sides of that equation. I think that by and large there are several messages in the first *Lethal Weapon*. Dick”—Richard Donner, the director—“had a little thing about ‘Don’t eat tuna.’ And he got that in. And there was also a message about condoms, which he got in. There were a lot of messages within the drama, and that is part of the reason people felt it was very accessible to the real world. So I think if you can have stories, and I think *Lethal* is one of them, in which the bond, the relationship between the cops and Danny’s family, and Mel as a loner, was such that you had an emotional connection—when you have that, you succeed. When you have movies that are violence for violence’s sake, you don’t succeed.”

So what won’t Canton do?

“I would not consciously involve us in any motion picture that I really felt was without any logical component to the story, any redeeming overt value.”



So what movies does he think went over the edge?

Canton declined to name any. Instead, he retreated to the high ground, saying that he sensed—and that Columbia's research confirmed this—that “PG movies, by far, have become more popular.” Perhaps this was why the new Arnold Schwarzenegger feature, *Last Action Hero*, would be more like a James Bond movie, without blood, without graphic violence or language. “I believe there is starting to be a turn toward the family movie,” Canton said—a “new mood” in Hollywood. Yet a second later he said, “What I don't like, what I won't allow myself to be, is censored by the critics—the Michael Medveds.”

Hollywood has a “bias for the bizarre,” Medved wrote in his 1992 book *Hollywood vs. America*, which catalogues one gory detail after another in mass-marketed films, videos, and records—episodes in which performers drink urine, rip toenails out with pliers, and torture women. Why is it “censorship” if a movie critic and author like Medved urges—as he does, and as Canton seemed to be doing at one point in our conversation—that moviemakers think more about the consequences of what they put on the screen?

In reply, Canton mentioned his own liberalism. “We were the people in the sixties who were advocating peace,” he said. “We were out there. We worked at the social issues. And we are the responsible citizens and leaders now. I believe we know how to manage ourselves.”

A SMALL studio that has managed itself well, both making money and producing or distributing quality movies, is Miramax Films, which was recently acquired by Disney. Its output includes *The Crying Game*, *Cinema Paradiso*, *My Left Foot*, *The Grifters*, *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, *Passion Fish*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *Enchanted April*. Miramax is the creation of two brothers from Queens, Harvey and Robert Weinstein.

What won't you do?

“I wouldn't put violence for violence's sake on a movie screen,” Harvey Weinstein said in an interview in his office, in Tribeca. But he added that his wife thought *Reservoir Dogs* was excessively violent, and walked out

when Miramax screened it. “It was too real,” he said. “It wasn’t cartoon violence.” Still, Weinstein feels that the movie accurately depicted the banality of the lives of six small-time hoods with hair-trigger tempers. To his wife, it was gruesome. “At the end of the day, it’s back to your own personal taste,” Weinstein said. “Is Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* art, or is it gratuitous violence? I thought it was a great film. Yet I know a lot of women who felt it was gratuitous violence.”

AS the mother of a six-year-old boy, Debra Winger gets livid when she hears that Oliver Stone calls movie ratings a form of censorship. “That’s bullshit!” she exclaimed in a telephone interview. “He gets to do whatever he wants. We just want to let people know by some code what it is, so they can decide whether to take their six-year-old or not. Where’s his conscience?”

Unlike Stone, Winger finds “gratuitous violence” and kinky sex in too many movies. Like Murdoch, she has not always lived up to her professed standards. But her attitude changed when her son, Noah, was born. “I don’t have any nannies, or anything,” said Winger, who left Los Angeles to bring up her son alone in upstate New York. “So when I go out to the movies I usually have to go see something he can see, unless I have a night out. But when I want to see something that’s going to entertain me as well, I find it sort of startling.” She scans the small boxes in movie ads searching for PG ratings, which are uncommon. She worries about violence. She worries about foul language. She worries about explicit sex. As an actress in pursuit of interesting roles, she saw these ratings as a threat. Now that she is a parent, she sees them as a guide.

Sometimes she won’t let Noah see films that carry a PG-13 label. “I wouldn’t let him see *Home Alone*,” she said, of the movie made by Murdoch’s Fox studio. “I hate films where the parents are idiots.” She also hated the joy that the son, played by Macauley Culkin, took in committing acts of violence. “I took Noah to see *A River Runs Through It*, which was great,” she said. “But, my God, getting him through the coming attractions—I had to throw a body block!”

What won’t Debra Winger do?

“Gratuitous violence, to me, is not entertaining,” she said. “A lot of people can file it as pure entertainment. I have not been without violent moments in my films, but they’re limited, and they’re very specific. And, even then, it’s my least favorite thing. I mean, somebody blowing away 15 people in the first reel!”

Why do so many Hollywood figures get defensive about what they view as censorship?

“They’re all killers,” she said. “They go from being devoted to their families to being killers. They’re cutthroat. When I talk to them about their kids, this is where I find a big defensiveness comes up. They’re doing things out in the world that are very, very questionable. And they’re all these sort of liberal Democrats. It’s all very confusing. It’s almost as if they never paused and looked at the whole picture. I see people who go along and their kids are gathered like assets—you know, ‘I have three children now.’” In Winger’s view, Hollywood itself, with its insularity and its comfortable way of life, shields people from reality, and that may explain why there is a disjunction between the movies made and the individuals who make them. “I’m a strong believer in adversity, and, with the weather there being what it is, and everybody with three cars, and everything there for you, it’s sort of tragic, in a weird way,” she said. “There’s no feeling of how the world really works.”

STEVEN SEAGAL writes, produces, and stars in the kind of violent action adventures that Debra Winger shields her son from. A former martial-arts instructor, Seagal has now starred in five popular films, often playing the role of an avenger who takes the law into his own hands to crush the forces of darkness.

What won’t you do?

“The no-no’s for me certainly include making pictures that are simply exploitive,” Seagal said while relaxing in an office bungalow on the Warner Brothers lot, in Burbank. “I’ve been forced to make movies that I didn’t care for, and tried to turn them into something that they originally weren’t. And I’m finally getting the power in my career to make the kind of movies that I want to make.” He mentioned *Hard to Kill* as a film

he “didn’t want to make,” as if he had been forced to make it. The film was “about nothing,” he said, and was “a piece of shit.”

Does he worry about the impact of the violence in his films?

“Absolutely,” he said. “The only thing I can say is that I get thousands and thousands of letters from all over the world—I guess probably hundreds of thousands.” Most of those who write look upon him “as a positive role model,” he said. “So I must be doing something in my films to give that impression. I never did violence in any of my pictures that was unjustifiable.” He defended the vigilante roles he has played, saying, “The judicial system is very flawed, and it’s very seldom that the bad guys really get their come-uppance. We’re living in a world where the evil and the strong prey upon the innocent, and get away with it, in a large sense.”

Is he concerned that his movies might encourage vigilantism?

“No, because I think history has sort of proven that if people were more rebellious in their thought the system would have to change for the better, because it’s not working,” he said. “History has proven that people are so complacent that they are being slowly devastated by urban life the way it is.”

MICHAEL OVITZ, who is the chairman of the Creative Artists Agency, one of the three major Hollywood talent agencies, was once one of Seagal’s martial-arts students. He made the deal for Seagal’s first film role.

What won’t Michael Ovitz do?

“Let me start by telling you how we operate on a day-to-day basis,” he said. “We have meetings every single day. All the projects—incoming rights materials, ideas, newspaper stories, magazine articles—are reviewed.” Of the case involving Amy Fisher and Joey Buttafuoco he said, “In the context of one of those meetings, it came to my attention that we were offered by the lawyer for one of the principals the rights to put it together as a movie or a television movie. And I declined to get involved. I really thought that it was not something this company should associate itself with. Now, by the way, three networks did movies on it. And reasonable men differ. I’m not sitting here passing judgment.”

Why did he make that choice?

“I was just exceedingly uncomfortable with the whole story and the reality of it—the tabloid reality of it. That’s not to say that some of the fiction that we get involved with is better or worse.”

What other projects would CAA decline to represent?

“I can’t say in a blanket statement like that,” Ovitz replied. “I would never comment on creative people’s work. It’s not our job to do anything but advise and attempt to be almost pre-editors for them. It’s not our job to tell creative people what not to do—unless we think it’s morally reprehensible. These are not legal, or even ethical, issues. We are the agents, not the principals. We’re not a studio.”

What about Madonna’s *Sex* book, which many critics dismissed as pornographic? Did Ovitz have qualms about representing the book?

“I think she is brilliant,” he said. “I have to tell you that. So I have a personal bias. Whether I agree or disagree with the content of what she does is not relevant. That’s a personal issue. When she described the book to us, I thought the whole concept was quite well thought out. The idea of a book being sealed, so it took on a certain taboo, if you will—I’m using her words.” He said that CAA represented Madonna on the basis of her oral description of the book. “This was her vision. I had no sense at all of what the content of the book was going to be like. It covered a subject that’s as old as the hills, just in a different way. This is a woman who consistently reinvents herself every year. That doesn’t happen by accident. I think she’s really smart. Did I agree with all the pictures in there? It’s not relevant. I didn’t know what was in her mind. I only had a vague sense of it when she laid it out for us.”

He has three young children. Would he let them see the book?

Ovitz hesitated, seeming embarrassed by the question. Then he declared, “I’m not going to get into it. I don’t believe that anyone’s forced to go see anything. No one was forced to go see Madonna’s book, by the way. And

it was in a sealed cover. In order to see it, you had to buy it. Or see somebody else's. That's a personal choice. It's like going to see movies. It's self-choice."

Does he believe that violence has an impact on audiences, particularly kids?

"Yes and no," Ovitz replied. He said that seeing a violent film was a question of choice, and that the violence in movies was often "not real." He continued, "People aren't really getting killed. When you were a kid, people said, 'Let's make believe.'"

When he was asked again if he thought that movie violence had any impact, he said, "I absolutely think it has an impact on kids. It becomes a framework on which children build. I remember all the things of my childhood. They've been my framework for my own value system, and I grew up in the fifties in Los Angeles."

Ovitz believes that the movie business corrects its own excesses, and that if there are too many violent and too few PG movies the situation will change. Yet he also believes that what drives the rush for action-adventure movies is the need to top the other guy with slam-bang special effects, with often expensive novelty, with big hits that can help subsidize other pictures. Then he says, "I don't believe this has to be a business of hits. I believe it is possible to have a very mixed business. I think Warner Brothers has proven that very nicely. Warners has had its share of hits, but nowhere near what a lot of other companies have. It's hit a lot of singles and doubles. It has a real mix of movies, and it's to be complimented for it. The same company can do *Driving Miss Daisy* and *JFK* and *Batman* and *Lethal Weapon*."

Of course, *Batman Returns* is a grimly violent film to promote to children in McDonald's, as Warners did, and the body count in *Lethal Weapon* rivals that of the Vietnam War. But Ovitz still believes that Warners is special because it has been managed by Robert A. Daly, its chairman, and his president, Terry Semel, for more than a decade, whereas most studios change their management far more often. "In a lot of companies, there's an enormous amount of turmoil and turnover,"

Ovitz said. “And what that creates is short-term thinking. And one of the things that have hurt our business the most is the lack of people who have the ability to work through their convictions over long periods of time. They’re always worried about quarterly reports, and about getting thrown out of their jobs. That instability creates bad product.”

HOLLYWOOD may traffic in violent movies, but it doesn’t traffic in public criticism of fellow members of the colony. Few executives speak on the record of actual movies they wouldn’t have made or actual performances they wouldn’t have produced. An exception, in addition to Rupert Murdoch, is the record and movie producer David Geffen (who sold his Geffen Records to MCA in 1990). When he was asked what he wouldn’t do, he answered instantly, “Rather than talk about what I wouldn’t do in the abstract, I wouldn’t put out the Geto Boys record or Andrew Dice Clay” because he felt that they “celebrated murder” or were “homophobic”—though he did produce albums by Guns ‘N’ Roses that were widely regarded as containing homophobic material. He disagreed with Time Warner for producing an album by Ice-T: “I’m not going to put out a record about killing policemen.”

What would Geffen say to those who claim that he threatens artistic freedom?

“They’re free to go make these records,” he said. “And other companies are free to distribute them. I’m not going to do it. I’m not saying they don’t have the right to do this. I’m simply saying I have the right not to sell them. It’s about responsibility. It’s not about artistic freedom or censorship.”

Geffen is quick to emphasize that he does not advocate censorship—that he believes “there are a great many people” in Hollywood “who really do care” and think about quality. But he also believes that the limitations—and the excesses—of the entertainment business spring from the weaknesses of the people in charge. “Too many people who are involved in the world of making movies don’t read, don’t have a sense of the written word,” he said. “They have no sense of story, and so they’re not burdened by seeing a movie that has no story. They have one overriding concern: Will it make money?”

THE director James L. Brooks is burdened by a quality that seems foreign to, say, Oliver Stone: ambivalence. He has written and directed *Broadcast News* and *Terms of Endearment*. He is an executive producer of *The Simpsons*, on the Fox network, and was a co-writer of such television classics as *Taxi* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Yet when Brooks was asked “What won’t you do?” he said, “I’m confused. There’s almost nothing I can say that I could not contradict. There’s no question in my mind that, as the parent of two young children, I have to wait a long time to find movies I can take them to. Yet the movie I’m making now—*I’ll Do Anything*—I wouldn’t want to take my kids to.”

As an artist, Brooks concurs with the belief of Oliver Stone and Michael Eisner that any strictures would place a ceiling on his imagination. Yet he applauds the Federal Communications Commission’s recent announcement that it would more strictly police the content of Saturday-morning cartoons. “We wouldn’t question it for a second if the government moved against drunk driving,” he says.

SOMETIMES, as Larry Gordon learned with *The Warriors*, it’s impossible to anticipate audience reaction. Should a filmmaker think about how the audience may respond? No, says John Landis, who worries that such thinking contains the seeds of censorship.

At 42, Landis has directed 13 feature-length movies, many of which have fared better with audiences than with critics, including *National Lampoon’s Animal House*, *The Blues Brothers*, *An American Werewolf in London*, and *Three Amigos*. He has also directed two Michael Jackson videos. In discussing one of those videos—“Black or White,” made in 1991—Landis inadvertently provided ammunition to those who claim that Hollywood indulges itself too much and thinks too little of consequences. In making this 11-minute video, Landis recalls, Michael Jackson looked at some footage and said, “It’s not dazzling enough.”

The last half of the video “was basically an improvisation,” Landis said. The video was being shot outdoors in downtown Los Angeles, and Jackson had the idea of letting the music and his mood lift him away. The intensity mounted. As Jackson danced, he noticed a garbage can, and he impulsively grabbed it and heaved it into a store window, shat-



tering the glass. He picked up a crowbar and smashed up a parked car. The violence was unscripted. Landis liked it. "Any Saturday-morning cartoon show has more violence than that," he told me.

But then Jackson further indulged himself, grabbing his crotch and simulating masturbation. He rubbed or squeezed or pulled down the zipper of his fly a total of 13 times. The choreographer applauded, mentioning that Madonna and Prince did this as well. It was but one example of a Hollywood culture that often exalts self-gratification, from liberated language to sex, drink, and drugs.

Landis was uneasy. "I pointed out that it's not Michael," he said. But Jackson felt that this was "what he wanted to do," Landis said, and Landis went along. At least, it was a bold attempt at self-expression, he said, adding, "Who's to say that's a bad thing?"

Thousands of parents said it was a bad thing. The public furor prompted Jackson to apologize and Landis to quickly sanitize the video.

Landis has no trouble with the movie-ratings system, believing that it was established "to prevent government censorship" and pointing out that "the MPAA doesn't say to you, 'You can't do this.'" But, like Oliver Stone and others, he seems to believe that censorship is a real danger to Hollywood. "Right now in America, people are taking *Huckleberry Finn* off bookshelves," he said. When he was asked about Dan Quayle's criticism of Hollywood's "cultural elite," he said, "The last time I heard that was in Berlin."

TED HARBERT is the president of the entertainment division of ABC, which finished the season in second place in the network-ratings system. (CBS was first.) I interviewed him at his office in Century City, in Los Angeles.

What won't Harbert do?

After a long pause, Harbert said that recently he had refused to approve a made-for-TV movie—"I don't want to name it, because it would be unfair to the producer," he said—because it was about nothing but "tit-

illation.” He was convinced that it would “get a big number,” he said, but he refused to make it, because he felt that doing so would be “pandering to the audience.”

Why, then, did ABC broadcast an Amy Fisher movie?

“Good question,” he said. He conceded that the networks had no reason to be proud that they had all done Amy Fisher movies. “Yet that’s not the full analysis,” Harbert said. The real question, he said, is why more than 100 million people watched these movies. “Part of me—I’m not sure how big a part of me, probably a small part of me—was hoping that after NBC put on the first one the audience would say, ‘O.K., I’ve seen my Amy Fisher story, and ABC’s and CBS’s I’m not gonna watch.’ This would be a good message to network television if the audience said, ‘One’s enough!’”

Why do viewers display such fervor for these stories?

“My perception is that Americans don’t talk to each other very much,” Harbert said. “People used to sit on the back fence and talk to each other. They’d sit on the front porch, and neighbors would talk. Television has replaced the back fence. Americans love to gossip. It’s just something that’s part of who we are. We get our gossip from television.... Americans now use made-for-TV movies as a way to look in their neighbors’ window. That being the case, then what’s the programmers’ decision about whether or not to do Amy Fisher?”

What’s Ted Harbert’s decision about what he won’t do?

He pointed to the picture of his daughter, Emily, on a bookcase. Emily is three, and a son, William, was born in April. “Emily’s entrance into the world totally changed the way I look at television,” he said. “I have a massive problem, a personal problem, with violence now on television. I am working very hard to minimize the amount of violence on our air. Frankly, I already think we do a pretty good job of it.”

Why did the arrival of a daughter alter his thinking as a programmer?

“Because when she sits there in front of the TV with me (and, fortunately or unfortunately, it’s going to be a fact of life in my home that the TV is going to be on a lot), if a promo comes on that I would never let her sit there and watch, or if something comes on that is violent, or the news comes on and she looks at it and this look of bewilderment comes across her face—‘What is that man doing, Daddy?’—I don’t have a very good answer.”

ABC recently broadcast a movie, “Between Love and Hate,” that ends with a youth firing six bullets into his former lover. Harbert’s defense is that a network, like a newspaper, offers choices. “I’m a firm believer that there is adult time, and adults get to watch adult programs,” he said. “And adults can handle that kind of television. Children can’t. This will sound like a paradox, but I don’t believe we have to program the network and absolve the parents of responsibility, as if it were our problem and not the parents’ problem. Parents have to be responsible for what their kids watch.”

Parents might agree with that, while also stressing the responsibility of Hollywood programmers for what they generate. Many Hollywood programmers lead two lives—a truth they avoid by complaining about government censorship. “We all know they’re good citizens,” observed Grant Tinker, the founder of the MTM Enterprises studio and the former chairman of NBC. “They give generously. They’re good parents. Then, on the lot, they make creative decisions for the wrong reason—to save their job. They are schizophrenics.” ©



Aspen Institute Roundtable on Leadership and the Media

“Artistic Freedom and Social Responsibility”

Santa Barbara, California  
January 30-February 1, 2005

**List of Participants**

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Ms. Harris earned a master’s degree in journalism from Columbia University and was a Bagehot Fellow in economics and business journalism at the same institution.

**Ken Auletta** has written Annals of Communications columns and profiles for *The New Yorker* magazine since 1992. During 2004 he served as Senior Fellow to the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program.

He is the author of ten books, including four national bestsellers: *Three Blind Mice: How the TV Networks Lost Their Way*; *Greed And Glory On Wall Street: The Fall of The House of Lehman*; *The Highwaymen: Warriors of the Information Super Highway*; and *World War 3.0: Microsoft and Its Enemies*. A collection of Ken’s *New Yorker* journalism pieces, *Backstory: Inside the Business of News*, was published by The Penguin Press in January 2004. His tenth book, *Media Man: Ted Turner’s Improbable Empire*, launched the Enterprise series for Norton/Atlas Book in the fall of 2004.



# **Previous Publications from the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Leadership and the Media**

*In Service of the Truth and the Common Good: The Impact of Media on Global Peace and Conflict* is the product of a meeting held in June 2003 among distinguished executives and journalists from American media; prominent religious leaders from the Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic faiths; and leading scholars and analysts of international affairs. The author, Frank Walton, examines the complexities that are inherent in the practice of journalism, particularly as they relate to matters of war and peace. The report examines four topics: the news and the truth, journalism's unwritten creed, news coverage of conflict, and concerns common to religious and media-based organizations.



# About the Communications and Society Program

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The Communications and Society Program is a global forum for leveraging the power of leaders and experts from business, government, and the nonprofit sector in the communications and information fields for the benefit of society. Its roundtable forums and other projects aim to improve democratic societies and diverse organizations through innovative, multidisciplinary, values-based policymaking. They promote constructive inquiry and dialogue and the development and dissemination of new models and options for informed and wise policy decisions.

In particular, the Program provides an active venue for global leaders and experts from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds to exchange and gain new knowledge and insights on the societal impact of advances in digital technology and network communications. The Program also creates a multidisciplinary space in the communications policymaking world where veteran and emerging decision makers can explore new concepts, find personal growth and insight, and develop new networks for the betterment of the policymaking process and society.

The Program's projects fall into one or more of three categories: communications and media policy, communications technology and the democratic process, and information technology and social change. Ongoing activities of the Communications and Society Program include annual roundtables on journalism and society, international journalism, telecommunications policy, Internet policy, information technology, and diversity and the media. The Program also convenes the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society, in which chief executive officers of business, government, and the nonprofit sector examine issues relating to the changing media and technology environment.

Conference reports and other materials are distributed to key policymakers and opinion leaders within the United States and around the world. They also are available to the public at large through the World Wide Web.





