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.Literature, Media, and the Construction of Juvenile Delinquency

or,

Nietzsche in the Nursery

Larry E. Sullivan, Ph.D.

Chief Librarian and Professor of Criminal Justice

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

City University of New York

As our work went on we established the basic ingredients of the most numerous and widely read comic books: violence; sadism and cruelty; the superman philosophy, an offshoot of Nietzsche's superman who said, 'When you go to women, don't forget the whip.' We also found that what seemed at first a problem in child psychology had much wider implications. Why does our civilization give to the child not its best but its worst, in paper, in language, in art, in ideas? What is the social meaning of these supermen, superwomen, super-lovers, super-boys, supergirls, super-ducks, super-mice, super-magicians, super-safecrackers? How did Nietzsche get into the nursery? (Frederic Wertham)

Although Frederic Wertham's book, Seduction of the Innocent (1954), was alarmist in nature, the sentiments he expressed are by

no means new or original. Reading has long been considered an active force in the child's moral development. By the mid-twentieth century critics also derided television and by the end of the century other electronic media were also included in the grab-bag of the devil. I begin with the comic book example just as a more modern expression of the idea that reading and media are primary forces in both the moral improvement and the degeneracy of children. Not many professionals thought that reading was the sole cause of juvenile delinquency, but it was an integral component of the construction of the child's morality.

The idea that reading equates with juvenile delinquency goes back more than a century. Even earlier, in the first half of the 19th century, reformers in Houses of Refuge worked on the minds of the deviant at a young age. In 1825, a group of benevolent philanthropists in New York founded the first home for juvenile delinquents. Almost immediately the institution received gift books for its library. These books were without exception of a religious nature, and the managers intended them to strengthen the characters of the wayward urchins. The prevailing philosophy, as one of the officials remarked, was "Prevention is better than cure, and with perseverance we shall save a number of little devils from becoming big ones." In the first 30 reports of this House of Refuge, the managers mentioned "instruction of the mind, or literary improvement" most often as a means of reforming their charges. We must not view such feelings as quaint or old fashioned. In a sense this view of reading and education as

correctives of criminal behavior is incorporated, *mutatis mutandis*, in contemporary moral education theory of punishment. There we see the idea that punishment through fear does not forcibly change criminals or deter them. The intention is to teach them a moral lesson which they will understand and accept for themselves. The aim is to persuade, not to manipulate or coerce. Punishment is thus present not as a dictate of an austere, unfeeling justice, but as an act of love which recognizes the offender's flawed humanity and hopes to persuade him or her to re-embrace the community and its values. Or, as the late philosopher Robert Nozick, declared "re-connect offender with correct values." The benevolent philanthropists of the 19th century shared, in their own way, this late 20th century articulation of the ideal of punishment. The very real difference is that the moral education theorists are primarily rationalizing punishment for the adult offender, not the juvenile.

During the nineteenth century we see evolving the view that education is a primary means for changing criminal behavior. It goes without saying that this emphasis on education went hand in hand with the rise of literacy and the proliferation of printed matter. The rehabilitative effects of education and reading moral literature were cited over and over in pronouncements of prison reformers and correctional therapists. The provision of prison and jail libraries was an important component in the rehabilitative program. We see instances, in fact very controversial ones, of

conflicts over what type of books a prison library should make available. One of the most fascinating examples is the political battle between Eliza Farnham, Sing Sing's women's matron in the mid 19th century, and the prison chaplain John Luckey, over the introduction of novels and phrenological literature into the prison library. Farnham, taking a very direct approach to "thought control" said: "The utility of well-adapted books to an ignorant and immoral person is beyond dispute. If there be any way to turn a man from evil deeds, it is to give him new thoughts." But Farnham's ideas of good books, which included Marmaduke Sampson's phrenology books as well as "useless" fiction, ran into strong opposition and she eventually lost the battle, and departed for a more phrenological career in Boston.

Into the 20th century the American Prison Association and the American Library Association took stands on reading material for convicts and even issued manuals that ranked books in order of "readability." For instance, Florence Rising Curtis in 1912 and 1918 stated:

The standard moral viewpoint that the prisoner finds in prison, in spite of discipline, [is] an opportunity to learn of the records and methods of more notorious criminals..... He needs books to turn his thoughts into other channels.... The salacious novel, with its suggestive descriptions and false standards, is not good mental food for the man who needs to learn self-control.

Austin MacCormick of the Federal Bureau of Prisons stated in 1931 that "The possible values of directed reading are almost limitless...." We must note that these and other reformers stressed the "directed" in reading, and certainly not free access.

And we must also never lose sight of the fact that educating a prisoner was to teach him to restrict his needs. All that was needed was training for a trade and moral and religious instruction in order to curb their wants and their passions. One must adept convicts to such norms of society as order, work, punctuality, thrift, and respect for property.

Convicts viewed reading as valuable also, but they had a different opinion of what they should read and what reading could accomplish. I have written elsewhere of the use of philosophers of the will such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the evolution of the mental and mythological constructs of convicts and criminals. The use of literature by many convicts was anything but salubrious in the eyes of professional reformers.

But it was uncontested that most everyone shared the position that reading could act as a strong force in the development of the moral (or immoral/amoral) life. Reading was even an indicator of a person's character. Zebulon Brockaway of Elmira Reformatory fame (or infamy according to some accounts), said "Tell me what you read; I will tell you what you are." Not much, if any, of the literature on reading for the adult or young adult convict mentions "bad" reading, but focuses on what the convict should read. As we get near the end of the 19th century,

however, we see that the concentration on juvenile reading becomes almost entirely negative. We no longer see the encomiums to mental improvement, but rather the concentration is on the deleterious, evil effects of bad literature on the young, impressionable mind. And also we read of the effects of literature on the "sick" mind. What happened? How did this idea emerge and gain acceptance at the same time that professionals were drawing up lists of suggested reading for adult offenders?

Youth became a separate category of offender in the late 19th century. There is no question that juveniles were treated differently even in the early 19th century. But there was no separate juvenile justice system until the end of the 19th century when Illinois passed the first law setting up the juvenile court system. Youth became a category basically without legal rights. To be sure, earlier laws and statutes classified children differently; for instance, in 1817 in Illinois a child under seven was not considered responsible for a criminal act, the age later raised to ten. (Seven years was usually the age in English Common Law. Blackstone says that under Saxon law "under twelve, it was held that he could not be guilty in will, neither after fourteen could he be supposed innocent, of any capital crime which he in fact committed." But he goes on "Under seven years of age indeed an infant cannot be guilty of felony... but at eight he may be guilty of felony." And usually a child under 18 was excluded from the penitentiary. State reformatories existed that in effect functioned as minor penitentiaries.

But during the great wave of reform of the "new penology" after the Civil War that saw the rise of a scientific penology claiming to know the causes of crime and hence the cure, and the creation of such reformatories as Elmira for young adults, these penologists began applying their principles to youth also. Juvenile offenders were subjected to "treatment", segregation from adult offenders, classification, and the indeterminate sentence -- a linchpin of Progressive penology. Juveniles were defined as something separate from the mainstream. And more importantly, sociologists, moralists, and custodians of virtue concentrated on the immorality of youth more than on the morality. The focus was on Otherness, the dark side of youth. Almost the entire concept of youth became negative, a child waiting to become the devil's plaything unless vigorous, aggressive action was taken. The evil elements in society (and in the genes) were attacking from all sides. Children were also classified as dependents, rather than as criminals morally responsible for their crimes. The penologist Frederick Wines stated that "We make criminals out of children who are not criminal by treating them as if they were criminals. What we should have, in our system of criminal jurisprudence, is an entirely separate system of courts for children .. who commit offenses which would be criminal in adults." The child who goes to court should have a "friend in court to look after his real interests." Late 19th-century reformers strove to take away criminal responsibility from children and to mold wayward morality in the direction of following the tenets of middle-class society.

They were not necessarily attempting to integrate, but to control.

So reformers had the child's "best interests" at heart, but who defines what is "best"? Thus the child becomes a thing in the eyes of the criminal justice system, something that someone else can judge and decide what can be done to improve him. The hallmark in the United States of this development was the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1899, which created the first court for children in the country. Other states followed suit.

Children were redefined and reified. The juvenile delinquent was created, conceptualized, and then diagnosed. The new system would impose sanctions on conduct unbecoming youth and take away both adult privileges and rights. The system was much more interested in restrictions than opportunities. The new reformers of juvenile behavior were pledged to shape youthful behavior from destructive influence to normative behavior on the model provided by the guardians of virtue. Through the concept of dependency and the new juvenile court system reformers could control family relationships, subordinate children to authority, shape morality, even form mental constructs or visions of the world through the policing of recreation, leisure, education, and reading. Because children were dependents and irresponsible, they had no legal rights. They were at the mercy of the courts and the professionals.

Many reforms were aimed at imposing sanctions on conduct unbecoming youth. Remove youth from the factors identified as criminal and the rest will take care of itself. Better yet, define

the causative factors of criminality and eradicate these evils root and branch. This essentialist view could only be actualized through segregation. Protect them from the sins of sex, alcohol, and evil literature. Reading becomes a destructive force on the unformed and unprotected minds of the young.

For adults, reading remained part of an educative process that would lead to improvement or moral education. For juveniles, however, reading became reified, just as the concept of youth did, and books took on the dual or binary character of good and evil. But evil was the more powerful and destructive force, and therefore the guardians had to take strong measures to impede the devil's progress. For youth the emphasis fell on what should NOT be read, rather than what should be read. Formation of character was too important and the Custodians of Virtue took it upon themselves to eradicate vice.

Reading became more pathogenic, even pathoepeous, than curative for youth. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the devil was found in the dime novel, story papers, and similar genres. Moralists railed at this literature with a certitude many today would envy. Anthony Comstock, using his customary evangelical rhetoric in his Traps for the Young, damned the editors of cheap dime novels who were "among Satan's efficient agents to advance his kingdom by destroying the young" who would take the "pernicious stories ... as models for themselves." Others wrote of youth who shot others "during a period of mental aberration caused by reading dime novels." Massachusetts took legal steps in

the 1880s which would prohibit books corruptive of morals and even attempted to keep news of crimes from juveniles. Paul Boyer has written of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Americas' first woman M.D. who stated " The dangers arising from vicious literature of any kind cannot be overestimated by parents... The permanent and incalculable injury which is done to the young mind by vicious reading, proved by all that we know about the structure and methods of growth of the human mind." Comstock remarked that "the Spirit of Evil made use of sensual books and art objects to "hand upon the walls of the chamber of imagery in the heart seductive pictures...for secret entertainment.'" Brander Mathews of Columbia University wrote:

The dreadful damage wrought to-day in every city, town, and village of these United States by the horrible and hideous stuff set weekly before the boys and girls of America by the villainous sheets which pander greedily and viciously to the natural taste of young readers for excitement, the irreparable wrong done by these vile publications, is hidden from no one.

Thomas Travis, in his The Young Malefactor of 1908, a study attempting to refute the Lombrosian theory of the atavistic characteristics of criminals, puts "bad literature" right up front in his list of causes of juvenile crime: "It is not unknown to find counterfeiting and even murder from bad reading. French, the Orange boy, recently convicted for sending infernal machines through the mails, explained that he had obtained his plans from

pictures of similar constructions published in the papers." He also gives the example of a "robber [who] had read dime novels from the age of seven." Others have also found reading as a cause of delinquency. J.J. Kelso, in an article in Charities journal makes a direct link between the two. It is interesting to note that, according to some criminologists, many of the plans of young criminals came from newspapers, as well as dime novels and comic books. Some psychologists lumped comic books with theatre and other bad influences.

Not all thinkers or professionals took this view. The important psychologist G. Stanley Hall, wrote in his Adolescence (1905) : "I incline to think that many children would be better and not worse for reading, provided it can be done in tender years, stories like those of Captain Kidd... and other gory tales... on the principle of the Aristotelian catharsis to arouse betimes the higher faculties which develop later, and whose function it is to deflate the bad centers and suppress or inhibit their activity." Or as another wrote that they "were not an unmixed blessing for they reward virtue and punish vice." But these views were distinctly in the minority. What most professionals and reformers were condemning, of course, was the influence of mass (later popular) culture on the lower or working classes. And here is the crux of the problem. Most of this literature was supposedly written almost exclusively for the lower classes and did not, professionals charged, portray life realistically. These romanticized stories had a stronger impression on the poor than on

the middle or upper classes, and did not instill such values as hard work, toil, and the delayed gratification so necessary to achieve the good American middle-class life. Such literature was more powerful on the young, lower class mind.

William Healy, a pioneer in the study of juvenile delinquency, in his The Individual Delinquent, (1915) also tackled the bad influence of the "the pernicious printed story." The influence of bad literature is established ... by virtue of arousing certain imagery which spurs to action. He holds that such imagery has on the individual, following unfortunate acquaintance with harmful literature, may be most powerful and frequently recurrent." Healy goes on to state that

The type of influence ... which is most prevalent in American life unquestionably arises from perusal of those cheap novels which deal with bandit and detective life. Judges in juvenile courts learn frequently of the effect of such reading upon even quite normal lads.....It is easy enough to learn from many young and old offenders that one of the chief formative influences of their careers was this reading matter.... A definite habit and craving for this type of reading is developed just as the individual develops a habit for alcoholic stimulants.

Later, in his New Light on Delinquency (1936), Healy is at some pains to explain the difference in reading habits among delinquents and his control group:

Evidently more delinquents were fond of reading and were even said to be great readers. As far as we could gather, the specific types of reading engaged in were rather similar for the two groups -- both preferring adventure stories of the type found in the cheaper magazines, but yet it was noted that some of the delinquents read more widely than this and enjoyed really good books.

This last point is of some interest. What are good books? Good books are rarely defined in the age after "delinquency" was constructed and defined as a separate category of criminal. At the same time as Healy was writing, sociologist T. Earl Sullenger in his Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency (1936) stated that one of the preventatives of delinquency is the activism of churches that offered among other activities "reading rooms stocked with good current literature." We do not, however, know what good literature is for the child. We do hear, again and again, what type of literature is destructive. But even the classics and more traditional literature carried the seeds of sin and damnation. Comstock stated:

There is a proper place for a "classic," a work of art or a medical work; but it can never be said that a man can take a purely medical work, for example, and opening it to certain pictures, which are properly contained in such a work can place the same in a window on a public street for youth

of both sexes to gaze at.

Youth would "become inflamed with lust," he claimed. Comstock went further and metaphorically described the evils inherent in classics as: "Garbage smells none the less rank and offensive because deposited in a marble fount or a gold or silver urn."

This was not just a Comstockian hysterical proclamation. It is, in fact, too easy to pick up such quotations from Comstock's rantings. The evil influence of even "respectable literature" was an idea accepted by many, and not just in the United State. For instance, one of the most comprehensive studies in this area was by the Italian sociologist Scipio Sighele. In his Litterature et Criminalite (1908) he gives numerous cases of literature directly or indirectly leading to crime. A few are worth citing. The novelist George Sand, for instance, "en exaltant dans ses romans la poesie des unions disparates et en ennoblissant l'amour des cochers et des grandes dames, avait contribue ... a faire tomber des jeunes filles dans les bras de leurs subalternes." This mismatch of course leads to a case in which a Mlle. Lemoine who was "accuse d'avoir tue l'enfant qu'elle avait eu de son cocher. .. because of what she read in Sand's novels, especially Valentine.

Sighele believes that the glorification of crime was the great aberration of romantic literature. He takes Schiller, Byron, Hugo to task for glorifying brigands and similar types. In creating literary monsters, they were creating real ones who patterned themselves after novelistic characters. For instance, "voici le

jeune assassin Lemoine qui declare a l'audience `Je lis beaucoup de romans, et dans l'un d'eux j'ai trouve la description du crime que j'ai accompli. Et en effet fut trouve dans sa chambre." Sighele gives case after case of how novels contributed to a heinous crime. Most of those influenced, however, were "subalterns," the lower classes so easily aroused to crime.

Sighele is not an isolated case, nor was Comstock. Just recently in some particularly heinous killings in the state of New Jersey, the lead article in the New York Times speculated that perhaps a book served as a model for a copycat killing. And of course Wertham devotes an entire chapter in Seduction of the Innocent to the influence of comic books on juvenile delinquency.

In one of the most celebrated murder cases of the 20th century fame, reading played an important role in the crime. This case was the famous Leopold-Loeb trial for the murder of Leopold's cousin Bobby Franks. There was no doubt about their guilt, so the trial revolved around the death penalty. Lawyer Clarence Darrow argued for the defense and stressed the reading of Nietzsche as a primary cause of their "sickness." As Darrow told the jury:

I have just made a few short extracts from Nietzsche to show the things that Nathan read and which no doubt influenced him. Here is a boy at sixteen or seventeen becoming obsessed with these doctrines.... It was not a casual bit of philosophy with him; it was his life. He believed in a Superman ... Many of us read this philosophy but know that it has no actual application to life; but not he. He lived it and practiced it;

he thought it applied to him, and he could not have believed it excepting that it either caused a diseased mind or was the result of a diseased mind.

Darrow, of course, persuaded the jury to spare the murderers' lives and they were given life sentences. So when almost 30 years later, Frederic Wertham decries the influence of Nietzsche's superman philosophy on young minds, he had good precedence to call on, for the philosopher penetrated the nursery much earlier. And since Leopold and Loeb certainly did not come from the working class, Nietzsche worked as a pathogen to reduce them to evil and criminous actions. The Bobby Franks murder case was not an isolated example for we can show similar cases in Europe.

The pernicious influences of reading reached a climax with the Senate Juvenile Delinquency Hearings of the 1950s. The hearings in 1955 are most informative. Even though Senator Estes Kefauver was using this forum to propel himself into the presidency, the hearings provide evidence of the fears of the influence of mass culture on delinquency. As an earlier inquiry (1950) on the evil effects of reading comic books proved inconclusive, Kefauver's subcommittee took a cautious, multi-causal stance on the effects of mass media on juvenile delinquency, but emphasized:

...the subcommittee has not been searching for 'one cause.' Delinquency is the product of many related causal factors. But it can scarcely be questioned that the impact of these media does constitute a significant factor in the total problem. Juvenile delinquency in America today must be viewed

in the framework of the total community-climate in which children live. Certainly, none of the children who get into trouble live in a social vacuum. One of the most significant changes of the past quarter-century has been the wide diffusion of the printed word, particularly in certain periodicals, plus the phenomenal growth of radio and television audiences.

The subcommittee concluded by calling for the enforcement of standards in the mass media and expressed some surprise that the educational establishment had not taken notice of the dangers in reading comic books, especially those that dealt with horror and crime. Kefauver and his colleagues urged some form of control on the mass media.

The inconclusivity of the hearings mirrored the controversies over defining delinquency in the sociological and psychological worlds of the same period. The world was changing. No longer was delinquency, or even criminality, so neatly defined as in the heyday of Progressive criminology and penology. The Progressives believed they knew what caused criminality and had the solutions to the crime problem. Many writings focused on the acculturation problems of immigrants. But post World War II America changed all that and numerous different theories came into play. Many sociologists blamed the breakdown of the family as the cause of delinquency. From there they went to other problems, especially

those that dealt with the interaction of the child and society. Robert Merton claimed that delinquency resulted from the disparity between the child's aspirations and the frustration of realizing them. Anomie was the rage for a while. Albert Cohen's influential book Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang (1955) asserted that lower-class children, rejected by middle-class society, entered into deviant subcultures because of the bourgeoisie's perception of them, and they then in turn accepted values inimical to the dominant class. One of the most influential books of the period was Richard Cloward's and Lloyd Ohlin's, Delinquency and Opportunity (1960). In it, the authors put forth their idea of "differential opportunity." This drew on, among other theories, Merton's assertion that crime can be induced by culturally instilling social objectives conducive to criminal behavior; individuals adapt to the cultural milieu that leads to crime. Cloward and Ohlin formulated a typology of lower-class youths that was predictive of delinquency. They believed that everyone wanted to enter the great middle class, so the youth who is most delinquent is the one who wants middle-class wealth without enduring delayed gratification, hard work, or other traditional means to gain it. Therefore, he steals. This book helped bring about the Juvenile Delinquency and Control Act of 1961. We could go on with variations on such theories, but let us note that most deal with denied access to middle-class respectability. Importantly, however, is the general assertion that mass culture romanticized the "rogue male" and elaborated on the gaining of

wealth through illegitimate means. So even though mass culture/sensationalist literature may not "cause" crime, it certainly reinforces the delinquent subculture. The rogue male also equates with the "superman" syndrome so conducive to delinquency that Frederic Wertham decried. Nietzsche was still in the nursery. (Interesting to note that Wonderwoman, an inimical influence according to Wertham, was taken up as a symbol of feminism in the 1960s by such leaders as Gloria Steinem.)

What are we to make of this? We have a variety of issues at hand. Why did these people blame literature as a cause, if not the cause, of juvenile delinquency? And what is it about literature that gives it this power? What we can deduce is that the theorists and politicians feared what was portrayed in this popular literature. From dime novels to comic books, and from Comstock to Wertham and others in between, the "rogue male", unlicensed sexuality, brute force, were emphasized as the dominant factors of this literature "which glorifies the brute, literature which undermines the law simply because it suggests that the superman is the person who should take the law into his own hands and mete out justice in his own way" It is interesting to note that the Senate hearing also stated that "The end of a criminal's career came about, if at all, through chance factors or by superhuman beings or other ideal types. As the latter two do not exist in reality, the obvious interpretation from these stories is that crime does pay if one is ruthless and clever to a sufficient degree." Leo Berg in his Der Ubermensch in der Moderner Literatur

concisely stated earlier (1897) that "the best and the strongest went to jail."

What is evident in all of these writings, from the academics to the alarmists, is that this evil superman, this Nietzschean being of superior will, strength, self-confidence, without fear is almost always of the lower classes. So therefore, it will appeal mostly to the lower class children or to those products of dysfunctional families (to account for Cohen's middle class delinquents). And in most literature produced by the literati or intellectuals of this period, the lower classes are described as something Other (even in leftist political literature), and a very fearful Other at that. Whether the "dangerous classes" devolved into a lower state through heredity, environment, or a Lamarckian combination of transmission, their habitat was "a jungle abounding in treacherous quicksand and infested by the most venomous and noisome creatures of the animal kingdom - a swamp in which any misstep may plunge you into the choking depths of a quagmire or the coils of a slimy reptile." Just what the middle class needs -- an amoral superman coming out of the depths to wreak havoc on their orderly world.

The custodians of morals believed they could keep this world orderly by eradicating what they defined as evil or immoral. But the world was moving too fast for them. Mass or popular culture was expanding too rapidly. What they said about comic books they said about dime novels and other sensationalist literature earlier and what they would say about movies and rap music today. But

youth changed also. And juvenile justice was redefined in the 1967 Supreme Court case, In re Gault.

This was, in part, a question of cultural power and who defines cultural taste. Perhaps intellectuals from the Frankfurt School summed up American popular culture best when Theodore Adorno said that " The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance." For them, mass culture affirmed the contemporary social order and it amused rather than instructed. But most Americans misread the Frankurt School's critique of mass culture (even though Fredric Wertham claimed to know Adorno well). Instead of understanding the power implications inherent in mass media, politicians and others in power felt they were losing control of the minds of the lower classes. The literati or intellectuals also decried the influence of mass culture on the country. The official report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) concluded in part:

The effects of overemphasis on sex motives, of the destruction of reticence and normal shame, of the malodorous realism which claims superior candor and novelty for its rediscovery that man is an animal -- what are the effects? Nothing at all that the eye can see; nothing but the slow unbalancing of emotion in the accepting mind, the gradual confirmation in the individual case of the hypothesis put before him that man is an animal--and nothing else.

We cannot say that we have an epistemological break here with the late Post World War II debate over mass culture. In fact, we see the same theme playing through the attempts at movie censorship, codes, and even more recently with the movement to control objectionable content on the Internet and the extremely violent nature of video games. It is also seen in the playing fields of the school where "rogue males" are tamed through drugs and "therapy." Antonio Gramsci said it long ago: "Every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogic relationship."

This stand is the point of moral education punishment theory, which is gaining ground in the carceral arena. We who know best believe that youth, and especially lower class youth, have a propensity to receive literature, or mass media, in the worst possible way unless filtered through our definition of morality. This is what sociologists and psychologists such as Sieghale, Healy, Cohen, et al. were saying. Lawrence Friedman in his popular Crime and Punishment in American History misses the point when he says "juveniles are not brought into court by "hegemonists" but by parents." But the parents were indeed following the dictates of the "hegemonists" or custodians of morals by bringing their rogue male offspring or wayward daughters into the criminal justice system. The system would set them straight and the system would define what print culture is not. Very few attempted to define what youth should read. Pocket Books and its Teen Age Book Club attempted to wean children from comic books to more substantial reading in the 1950s, but what was substantial reading, other than

that published by Pocket Books? We have already seen that even the classics cause evil. The irony is that from the earliest jeremiads on youth and reading, the material itself, perhaps with violence and sensation, usually embodied dominant moral themes. As one commentator stated above, virtue always won out over vice. And without action, adventure, etc., in literature, television, etc. would youth want to read the books or watch the programs? Would they sit and read only devotional or other moral literature, and watch wholesome family dramas? I think not.

In fact, just the opposite seems to be happening and juveniles are exposed to even more violence in the media. The Federal Trade Commission's "Report on the Marketing of Violent Entertainment to Children" (2000) reads like earlier tracts and studies on the harmful effects on children of literature and other media. One commentary (Diane Levin) on the report remarked that

We urgently need a society-wide commitment to work to reduce the amount and kinds of entertainment violence that is marketed to children.... It is in the best interest of all society to create an environment that supports children's healthy social, emotional and intellectual development, one which protects them, especially when they are young....

Here we have the force of a number of prestigious medical and professional associations coming out against "inappropriate" media content for juveniles. But the fact of the matter is that according to available statistics, much juvenile crime and violence has not increased but in fact may have decreased. It may be that

children are more vulnerable to violent media's harmful effects (but this is by no means proven empirically), but those same effects are neutralized by the civilizing process in Western societies as defined by the sociologist Norbert Elias in his seminal work of 1937. We need only compare the levels of violence among youth in those countries with more advanced technological economical bases with those states that have little access to sophisticated media. To take just one example, Japan's youth has access to extremely violent movies, video games and comic books, but has little violent crime compared to most countries, even in the West. But in many Third World countries children as young as ten are in the army and committing terribly violent atrocities against their fellow countrymen (or children). We certainly cannot blame this violence on video games.

In fact, I would suggest that in the more advanced civilizations violent media serve as safe places or havens for transgression. They give youth opportunities to explore certain transgressive ideas without acting them out -- a safety valve, so to speak. I suggest that we should correlate the data put forward by social scientists with the actuality of juvenile crime before placing blame. Today, our politicians and moralists show outrage at the immorality of contemporary popular culture, but the cry has lost its resonance for we have heard it too often before.