TELEVISION VIOLENCE, AFRICAN-AMERICANS, AND SOCIAL CONTROL 1950-1976

HENRY TAYLOR
CAROL DOZIER
Columbus, Ohio

Television, over the past three decades, has become the primary interpreter of American life and history, and the principal socializing institution in the United States (Cater and Adler, 1974). Because of the great popularity of this medium, the prevalence of violence on television has precipitated an ongoing debate, and a voluminous literature, about the effect that violent TV programs have on the social behavior of children and adults.[1] One side contends that continuous exposure to TV violence stimulates aggressive anti-social behavior among select members of the mass viewing audience, and that this had led to increases in violent crime and juvenile delinquency. TV, this side argues, not only mirrors the violent content of social reality, but also contributes to violent behavior by creating a vast fantasy world peopled with appealing but violent characters who serve as social role models (Newcombe, 1979; Cater and Strickland, 1975; Seigal, 1957). The other side argues that television merely reflects the ideas that people already have about the world in which they live, and that TV violence has little effect on the social behavior of

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 14 No. 2, December 1983 107-136

either children or adults (Schwartz, 1973; Barnouw, 1970; Lange et al., 1969; McLuhan, 1964; Klapper, 1960).

Both sides in the debate about television violence usually restrict their inquiry into the complex psychosocial relationship between television violence and social behavior, to the rather simplistic question of whether or not TV violence is a major cause of violent antisocial behavior in American society today. Historical studies, however, provide a broader perspective and a much more cogent answer to the more basic questions of the general nature and basic causes of violence in America. The American experience has been plagued by an epidemic of violence, ranging from numerous border or territorial wars, to foreign wars, agrarian revolts, a full-fledged civil war, massacres of Indians, the torture of slaves, employer bellicosity toward workers, street violence in the slums, gang warfare, KKK lynchings of blacks, domestic violence, and the like (Kelley, 1981; Madol and Wakelyn, 1980; Boyer and Morias, 1971; Franklin, 1956)—all of which predate the advent of television. H. Rap Brown's widely quoted statement, "Violence is as American as cherry pie," is, unfortunately but indisputably, historically accurate. Seen against the backdrop of violence that is stimulated by other historical causal factors, any possible marginal increase in violent social behavior caused by watching violent cowboy, police, and spy series on television must be considered a minor factor in the etiology of violent crime in this country (Dick, 1979; Ryan, 1971; Fanon, 1963).[2] Furthermore, there are no widely accepted explanations of why television violence might bring about violent antisocial behavior in some individuals but not in others, or of *how* the lone factor of TV violence might be known to cause violent behavior in an individual who (we somehow assume) would not otherwise commit such acts. It is also an open question whether TV violence might not "put off" many people in such a way as to discourage their use of violence. After all, many of today's anti-TV-violence campaigners grew up watching cowboy movies and "who-done-its." In short, how can we quantify the net impact of this complex variable on a complex, historically violent society which nearly universally watches television?

The critics of television violence, while condemning violence and recognizing the importance of television as a learning source, have paid little systematic attention to the *content* of TV violence as a source of basic ideas about the social order. As an instrument of socialization, American commercial television is intimately involved with social conflict and social control. This involvement, as Clark (1969) suggests, is much more fundamental than the quiescent presentation of some people enjoying the fruits of society while others do not. Not only does TV uncritically reflect the social structure of society in its selection and presentation of characters associated with class divisions, but it also reinforces the notion that there is a fixed order in society, and that whoever tries to upset that order will meet with tragedy (Schiller, 1976, 1975; Dorman and Mattchart, 1975; Heffner, 1973).

The hypothesis presented in this article is that television violence is used as a mechanism of social control in two interrelated ways. First, TV transmits a conservative concept of legitimate violence and the law enforcement system to the mass viewing audience. By presenting an endless parade of invincible, violent, and generally morally upright heroes, TV legitimizes the use of violence—including deadly force[3]—by those who defend the status quo, and reinforces the idea that the police are the good guys, altruistically dedicated to the protection of society from evildoers. Second, because African-Americans are historically the most oppressed, exploited, *and consistently militant* group in the United States, television attempts to control their potential militancy by projecting the violent black law enforcement officer as a role model for emulation by black youth: by glamorizing and overrepresenting law enforcement officers as an occupational type among black TV characters, television encourages African-Americans to view police work as a viable career choice (DeFleur, 1969). This article examines how TV violence serves not only as a socializing agent which presents to the mass viewing audience the narrow conservative view of violence and the law enforcement system, but also attempts, through the type of the violent

black police hero, to play a significant role in the political socialization of African-Americans.

TELEVISION'S EFFECT ON THE VIEWING AUDIENCE

This study is based on the premise that television constitutes a major factor in the shaping of people's perceptions of social reality, and that programming which features violent TV shows plays a special role in this process by molding people's attitudes, values, and beliefs about the nature and character of violence and the law enforcement system in American life and history. The basis of television's wide appeal and of its ability to shape people's ideas about different aspects of social reality is the story telling function of the medium. Gerbner and Signorielli (1979) suggest that TV drama and fiction play an important role in conveying information about social reality by demonstrating the invisible connections that show how institutions work and why. Barnouw (1970) argues that this connection between fantasy and reality is drawn even tighter in the docudrama, which intentionally fuses fiction and documentation in order to enhance a certain view of reality.[4] This merger of facts and fantasy, Barnouw points out, makes it even more difficult for people to distinguish between fantasy and reality. No one, of course, believes everything seen on television, but many people do believe that storylines are based on fact, at least at some level. Television series (with the obvious exception of some science fiction) purport to depict the actual functioning of real institutions and to accurately portray the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the people who perform various functions in society, and who work for or deal with various institutions (Monaco, 1981; Barnouw, 1970). Because of television's ability to validate reality, it may never occur to viewers to question whether a depiction is real; and if they do, they may conclude that a show is essentially true, "telling it like it is" (Barnouw, 1970).

People do seem to believe that television provides a generally accurate picture of the inner workings of the corporate world, hospitals, newspaper offices, law schools, the criminal justice system, and so on, which inner workings are outside the experience of the majority of the viewing audience. Television can have a tremendous impact on the public's perceptions of these institutions, even to the extent that television fiction and drama are perceived as portraying specific, actual institutions and/or real-life individuals. The *Philadelphia Bulletin* of July 10, 1974, reported that "Marcus Welby" during its first five years received over a quarter of a million letters from viewers, most requesting medical advice! A New York City police official complained that jury members formed images and expectations of trial procedures and outcomes from television that often prejudiced their decisions in actual trials. The series "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." actually precipitated numerous genuine job applications, by adults, to the U.N. for positions at U.N.C.L.E. (Gerbner et al., 1979; Barnouw, 1970).

If adults have problems disentangling fact from fiction in television content, the task must be even more difficult for children. Extensive research has been conducted to explore television's effect on children. While the conclusions of these studies are controversial, the research nevertheless suggests that the potential effect of television on children is substantial. For example, Rubin (1976, 1978) identifies television as the principal source of political information for children. His findings suggest that the viewing of certain types of television content may be functional to the learning of identities and roles of political figures and institutions. Dominick (1972) finds that the mass media are major sources of learning about important political objectives, including war, and these authors conclude that the mass media plays a significant role in the political socialization process. DeFleur (1969) argues that TV is an important source of incidental learning through which children develop a variety of concepts, ideas, attitudes, and preferences. He further suggests that "television occupational portrayals may provide important information for the young member of

the urban industrial society just before and during the time he makes important occupation-related choices and decisions." Incidental learning from television, DeFleur concludes, may contribute to a child's attitude toward his own future occupation, and toward his orientation to others who carry out specific work roles in the occupational structure. The magnitude of incidental learning from TV is amplified among black and poor children, who tend to spend more time watching television than their middle-class white counterparts (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977, 1979; Surlin and Dominick, 1970-1971). Despite the controversial aspects of the research on the effects that TV may have on children and adults, scholars do tend to agree that television absorbs extensive daily time and is a medium from which a substantial amount of incidental learning may take place.

TELEVISION VIOLENCE AND THE LAW ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM

To determine how television might shape the audience's perception of violence and the law enforcement system, we examined television show series from the period 1950 to 1976 which had law-enforcement personnel as heroes and/or which had other violent themes.[5] Since our preliminary sample revealed no difference in the manner in which violence was projected by the different networks, our data was not organized by network; nor was any effort made in this study to analyze programs in all formats or genres, since it has been well documented elsewhere that although the magnitude of violence will vary among adventure/action, drama, and comedy and variety shows, the *socializing intent* of television violence does not vary by show format or genre (Monaco, 1981).

The first step in our analysis was to determine if the protagonist in a violent TV series could be linked to any social institutions, because in real life violence does not take place within a vacuum, but is usually employed by people in response

to their environment and in order to accomplish some political, social, and/or economic end. It therefore seemed especially important to analyze those characters in these series who might serve as social role models, to determine whether they could be linked to any institution or social class. Protagonists in violent TV shows were found to be readily classifiable according to their relation to the law enforcement system, with three broad categories of heroes emerging: agents, independents, and surrogates.[6]

AGENTS

Agents were defined as those officers who were directly employed by some real or fictional law enforcement institution: police, FBI, intelligence agency, armed forces, etc. These individuals ranged from bumbling idiots (e.g., Agent Smart in "Get Smart," and Barney in "Mayberry, R.F.D"), to invincible superheroes (e.g., the "Six Million Dollar Man" and "Wonder Woman"). The variety of agent types seemed endless. There were beautiful women ("Police Woman"), sensitive young teenagers ("The Mod Squad"), invalids ("Ironside"), and kindly family men ("Mayberry, R.F.D."). The storyline in these shows was written to cast sympathy with the agent, who was typically portrayed as a warm, sensitive, empathetic, and caring individual who had dedicated his or her life to the protection of society. Although users of violence, the agents were usually characterized as men and women who eschewed violence and employed it only as a final resort. When agents were cast as the leading character, they were usually portrayed as shrewd, highly efficient police officers, who always emerged victorious in their struggle against crime.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the agents were unregulated. They were allowed to wiretap, intimidate, break and enter, and violate in various ways the constitutional rights of individuals. It should be stressed that on TV these unconstitutional acts were always shown in the context of the apprehension of (presumed) criminals, and agents were almost never shown

violating the rights of innocent people. It was during this same period, however, that African-Americans and other groups were successfully protesting against the use of such unconstitutional methods by the police in the real world (Simpson and Turnbull, 1978). By the late 1960s, television policemen generally had ceased committing their most conspicuous violations of people's constitutional rights, although some use of illegal and unconstitutional procedures in criminal investigations continued to take place in some of the programs. Arons and Katsh (1977) cite 43 separate scenes from 15 prime-time police shows broadcast in March, 1976, in which "serious questions could be raised about the propriety of police action." Because TV presented these illegal acts as legitimate, the authors of this study were fearful that citizens might not recognize violations of their own rights or those of other people.

On the international scene, no attempt was ever made to curtail the illegal activities of those TV agents involved in espionage. They continued to use a "by-any-means-necessary" approach to the overthrow and destabilization of governments that the U.S. believed to be unfriendly. Consequently, in shows like "Get Smart," "I Spy," and "Mission: Impossible," agents were allowed to commit assassinations and other murders, to commit acts of sabotage, and to overthrow governments. Table 1 characterizes in summary a representative sample of TV programs that featured agents.

INDEPENDENTS

The independents represented another category of violent television characters. Independents were not directly linked to any law enforcement institution, but were generally cast as detectives or investigators for private institutions such as insurance companies. In many instances the independents had had some prior negative experience with the law enforcement system before becoming private investigators. For example,

TABLE 1
Selected Programs that Feature Agents as Leading Characters

Program	Program Summary	Year
Police Woman	Adventures of a female police officer.	1975
The Rookies	Adventures of young police agents. A multi-racial group of police officers.	1975
Hawaii Five-O	Police adventures in Hawaii, in a multi-racial setting.	1970
Mayberry R. F. D.	Family man, friendly, casual sheriff, able to maintain law and order without carrying a weapon.	
The Untouchables	A series of stories about special agents fighting crime during the twenties.	1960
I Led Three Lives	Story of an undercover agent who spies on Communists working in U.S.A.	1955
Inside Detectives	A story about police detectives fighting crime.	1950

SOURCE: TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition.

"Switch" was a series about a former criminal who became a private detective, and "Charlie's Angels" was the story of three policewomen who had left boring assignments to become private investigators for a millionaire concerned with law enforcement. Independents in this type of series acted as allies of the police, either assisting them in solving problems that were outside the purview of traditional law enforcement, or aiding in the investigation of crimes that were difficult to solve. Because of their close working relationships with the police, independents in these series were given legal permission to carry guns and to engage in criminal investigations.

Like the agents, independents came in all sizes and shapes. There were beautiful women, blacks, older men, cunning youngsters, and even a few bumbling idiots. Because they operated outside the institutional law enforcement system, the independents were given greater latitude in the struggle against "crime." For example, they were allowed to wiretap, break and enter, offer bribes, and engage in other illegal activities in order to apprehend criminals. To justify these tactics, whenever independents were cast as leading characters, the police were portrayed either as incompetent buffoons or as good cops who needed help with a particularly difficult situation. This legitimized the independent's involvement in law enforcement and provided a rationale for his or her illegal crime-fighting activities. Because of the tenuous relation between the police and independents, conflicts often erupted between them. In the end, however, the superior talents and illegal tactics of the independents usually prevailed, and the fight temporarily subsided once the criminal was caught. Independents were projected as extensions of the agents, and their allies in the struggle to bring law and order to the United States. Because of this, they were allowed to use violence and deadly force in the struggle against crime. Table 2 presents a representative sample of programming that featured the independents.

SURROGATES

The most interesting of all the violent protagonists was the surrogate. Unlike the agents and independents, these defenders of the status quo did not earn their living fighting crime. However, because of a strong sense of civic responsibility, they joined the struggle against crime whenever law and order broke down. In this regard, the surrogate represented a new glorification of vigilantism in American life and history, and TV programming of this type created a modern type of the Western frontier—a lawless environment in which the individual had to assume responsibility for protection of the

TABLE 2
Selected Programs that Feature Independents as Leading Characters

Program	Program Summary	Year
Switch	Two reformed con artists turn private eye.	1975
Barnaby Jones	An insurance investigator solves crimes in the interest of insurance industry.	1970
77 Sunset Strip	Youth generation detectives aid police.	1960
Hawaii Five-O	Private detectives chase criminals in a tropical setting.	1960
Wells Fargo	A Western detective uses cunning and courage to make West safe for Wells Fargo.	1958
Peter Gunn	Private detective uses his skills to apprehend criminals for a variety of clients.	1957

SOURCE: TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition.

establishment and the maintenance of law and order (Frantz, 1970).

Surrogates differed from agents and independents in three significant ways. First, they did not earn their living fighting crime. They were just concerned citizens who rose to the occasion whenever law enforcement broke down, and it is important to note that they were usually cast in roles where they came to the rescue of ordinary citizens. Second, they had no legal permission to carry weapons or to engage in criminal investigations. However, because they were recognized as allies in the struggle against crime, they were given social sanction to use violence and even deadly force. Third, many surrogates did not live in any given city, but were cast as wanderers who

somehow repeatedly found themselves in one community after another where law enforcement had broken down. To justify their roving, surrogates were often portrayed as fugitives who had been wrongly accused of some crime and were forced to move from place to place while they struggled to prove their innocence. Exceptions to the fugitive rationale were found in "Bronson," "B.J. and the Bear," and "Moving On." "Bronson was the story of a successful businessman who wanted to escape the urban rat race and find the simplicity of nineteenth century America. Instead of utopia, Bronson found a country torn with rampant lawlessness and was transformed into a roving crime fighter. The implication was that Bronson was independently wealthy, since he never worked and had plenty of money. On the other hand, David Banner in "The Incredible Hulk" had to take an assortment of odd jobs to sustain himself. In the seventies, the popularity of truckers created yet another rationale for roving surrogates, and "B.J. and the Bear" and "Moving On" introduced the trucker surrogate to the mass viewing audience. Table 3 shows a representative sample of programming that featured surrogates.

One unifying theme among shows featuring agents, independents, or surrogates is that those individuals who fight to uphold the status quo are assumed to have a moral if not legal right to use violence and deadly force. To cast sympathy with these violent protagonists, they were portrayed as superheroes who dedicated their lives to the struggle against crime. In the early days of television, these superheroes were portrayed as paragons of virtue who did not smoke, drink, gamble, curse, or philander. In the 1950 Westerns, for example, the superheroes wore white hats and had good manners and impeccable morals. During the 60s and 70s, the image of the violent heroes was changed, but their halos were not completely removed. In shows like "Columbo," "Kojak," "Cannon," "Ellery Queen," "Police Story," "The Streets of San Francisco," and "Baretta," the defenders of the status quo still represented the living embodiment of moral rectitude.

Even in seemingly innocent situation comedies like "Barney Miller" and "Mayberry, R.F.D.," stories were written to

TABLE 3
Selected Programs that Feature Surrogates as Leading Characters

Program	Program Summary	Year
The Hulk	Scientist fights for truth and justice as he searches for a cure to a malady that transforms him into an invincible super hero.	1975
Bronson	Motorcyclist roams the countryside bringing justice to obscure little communities.	1975
Bonanza	Cartwright family fights to bring justice to the Old West.	1965
The Big Valley	Matriarch and her sons battle evil doers in the Old West.	1965
The Lone Ranger	The masked man roams throughout the West bringing truth and justice to this untamed country.	1950
Hop-a-Long Cassidy	Cowboy roams the West fighting for truth and justice.	1950

SOURCE: TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition.

promote empathy, or the capacity to identify, with the police and law enforcement system personnel in general. These programs invited viewers to see policemen as individuals, with human strengths and weaknesses, rather than merely as impersonal members of impersonal law enforcement systems dedicated to the maintenance of the established order. The *content* of shows which feature violence seems therefore to obscure the *role* that the police and law enforcement system actually play in this country's racist, class-stratified society. The police are primarily concerned with the protection of property, and in this role they often come into conflict with striking workers, the black community, and other oppressed

minorities. Among African-Americans, the issues of police brutality and unequal treatment under the law are critical civil rights issues. It is, therefore, of signal importance that violent TV programming usually attempts to portray only the most positive or favorable image of the police and their relation to the black community. For example, in a 1969 episode of "The FBI," a black FBI agent leads a "treacherous ghetto" search for Nate Phelps (Billy Dee Williams), who is wanted for murder and robbery. In this sequence, the FBI agent emerges as the hero, while the former athlete is portrayed as nothing more than an insensitive killer; and the larger socio-political question of how a handsome black man with high status in the black community is transformed into a petty thief and killer is ignored (TV Guide, 1969a: A-32).

The content of violent TV programs also seems to promote the idea that violence used in defense of the status quo is morally if not legally justified, and socially necessary. Indeed, the presumed need to protect "society" from behaviors (and characters) which are simplistically portrayed as antisocial, is the central theme that runs throughout the history of violent TV programs: the hero has to be violent because the forces of evil will stop at nothing to destory democracy and/or the American way of life. The underlying assumption is that good and evil are naturally and everlastingly at odds, and that to obliterate the forces of evil violence must be employed. Since the heroes represent the forces of good, they are given social sanction to use violence in order to subdue the evildoers, and this sanction also serves to morally justify or purify their violent acts. Consequently, in shows like "Barnaby Jones," "Wells Fargo," "Peter Gunn," "Hawaii Five-O," "77 Sunset Strip," "The Man from U.N.C.L.E.," and "Kojak," the heroes were always forgiven, regardless of the degree of violence used in their escapades, and they were allowed to achieve a happy ending.

Violent TV programming, especially when it features a surrogate hero, also promotes the principle that *any citizen* who defends the established order has a right to use violence

against "public enemies." For example, in the January 7, 1970, episode of "The Virginian," the dowry of Mary Charles Marshall (Elizabeth Hubbard), a Southern lady who has come West to marry, is stolen by robbers. Rather than report the crime to the authorities and wait for them to apprehend the criminals, Mary Charles and her friends take matters into their own hands and pursue the robbers (TV Guide, 1970a: A-66). Furthermore, independents and surrogates were even allowed to set their own crime-fighting agendas, to define justice and injustice and criminal activity in their own terms, on the basis of their own personal experience, and without special training in or knowledge of the law. This form of agenda-setting is the essence of vigilantism, in which the community decides that its own abstract conceptualization of law and moral order has been violated, and then takes summary action. Agents, on the other hand, were more restricted. They were generally given orders to follow, and were expected to operate within the traditional constraints of the law enforcement system. Nevertheless, independents and surrogates—like their agent counterparts—were given social sanction to use violence against the "public enemies." Thus, the "Lone Ranger" was allowed to shoot and kill because he brought law and order to the Old West, and Superman's various violent acts were tolerated because the character came to earth to fight for truth and justice and the American way of life.

It is essential, at this point, to ask who the *targets* of these socially condoned acts of violence were, and which social groups were portrayed as the forces of evil. The most conspicuous targets of TV violence, of course, were those persons who murdered, robbed, or assaulted people, or committed crimes against property. But violent TV programming did not stop there: also presented as legitimate targets of social violence were certain individuals, groups, and organizations that fought for *their* own ideas of social justice and reform. To obtain sympathy for the suppression of social dissenters, opponents of the established order were cast as evildoers who would stop at nothing to achieve their evil or

fanatical goals, and any form of aggression they used against the established order was portrayed as wrong and intolerable. Commercial TV series in this period were seldom written to cast sympathy with the opponents of the social, political, and economic elites. For example, a 1969 episode of "The Mod Squad" called "The Confrontation" involves an explosive situation at a campus which has been the scene of much student unrest. A black student has been murdered on campus, and black militants believe that the police are responsible (TV Guide, 1969b: A-57). This episode, aired at a time when student militancy was at a peak, portrayed the militants as angry, violent, and unreasonable villains. Linc (Clarence Williams), a black undercover agent, emerges as the hero, and bloodshed is avoided as the police are cleared of any wrongdoing.

In a similar story on "Ironside," entitled "The Machismo Bag," a "rabid militant" called Monolo Rodriguez (A. Martinez), who resents the way Mexican-Americans are treated as second-class citizens, has organized a militant group called the Red Berets—a highly vocal group of dropout Chicanos—which is charged with conspiracy to commit treason. Ironside brings the group to justice as the police emerge as heroes. In one episode of "Adam-12," Malloy and Reed assist in the capture of a "socially conscious" sniper. This episode features the work of the Los Angeles Police Department's special weapons and tactics team that was created to fight crime in the streets and black revolutionaries (TV Guide, 1970b: A-12).

In the same way, native Americans were portrayed as bad guys, even though we all know—and historians have always known—that it was the white colonists who waged war against the indigenous population, then broke the treaties they had made with them and took their lands. Yet on television, Indian violence against white *soldiers* was rarely presented as politically or morally justified.

It should hardly be surprising, then, that commercial television also failed to develop any violent programs showing black leaders fighting with aggressive heroism against the forces of racism and discrimination; or showing workers

waging a courageous struggle against the repressive tactics of powerful employers; or showing poor welfare recipients struggling against the insensitive and inhumane policies of city governments and landlords. Instead, progressive blacks were cast as irrational revolutionaries, white leftists as terrorists, and native Americans as perfidious, marauding, vengeful tribal renegades who made war on innocent, peace-loving pioneers. Those who struggled against the power elites or the status quo always failed and never achieved a happy ending—unless, of course, they realized the error of their ways, repented, and united with the established order, like the "good Indian" who becomes a scout and fights against his own people. Even in the popular series "Daniel Boone," his Indian companion lived and worked among whites, and in one episode helped Daniel rescue two whites from "hostile Indians" (TV Guide, 1970c: A-23).

On the international level, the forces of evil were characterized as countries that the United States government considered unfriendly. This generally meant third-world or Eastern European countries that were opposed to colonial imperialism or Western capitalism. These countries were portrayed as dictatorships that violated human rights and posed a threat to world peace, so that their governments needed to be destablized or overthrown. "I Spy," "Mission: Impossible," "Get Smart," and "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." were all built around this general theme. For example, in a February 8, 1970, episode of "Mission: Impossible," the Mission Impossible team attempts to overthrow an unfriendly government by driving its leader insane (TV Guide, 1970d: A-30). In another story, the Mission Impossible team works with the U.S. State Department to help an ousted right-wing dictator regain power (TV Guide, 1970b: A-10). Even the FBI is allowed occasionally to become involved in TV's world of international intrigue. In one sequence, Erskine (Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.) poses as a communist agent and helps a communist official and his wife escape, with top-secret government documents, from East Germany (TV Guide, 1970c: A-26). In

each of these shows, the storyline is written so that the audience will ignore the violent and unlawful actions of the heroes and give moral sanction to the violation of the territorial rights of other countries.

SOCIAL CONFLICT, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND TV VIOLENCE

This paper's argument that television violence was used as a tool of social control is perhaps best supported by the fact that the effort to get the mass viewing audience to accept television's conception of violence and the law enforcement system is particularly manifest during periods of social unrest (Alley, 1979; Clark, 1969). For example, between 1958 and 1962, there was a sizable increase in violent TV programming. These were the years when civil rights workers sought to win enforcement of the 1958 Supreme Court ruling that outlawed segregation in public transportation. During the period 1962-1965, however—a period of relative social calm—there was a reduction in shows that featued violent themes. From 1965 onward, the upturn in social unrest was followed by increases in violent TV programming. This was the period of urban rebellions, and of the black power and antiwar movements. During this period of rising militancy, the police were frequent targets of public criticism (Conyers, 1981; Sherman, 1980). Charges of police brutality and the use of excessive force were particularly sharp following the murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and the deaths at Attica, Kent State, Jackson, North Carolina A&T, and the protest rally at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. By the fall of 1975, television had produced 22 police-detective series with high Nielson ratings *TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition, January-March, 1964-1975).* The new violent shows, however, did not depict anything resembling the real-life militant movements of this period.

Coupled with the increase in violent TV programs was a change in the genre of these shows. Prior to the 1960s, the

Western had been the primary vehicle for teaching the mass viewing audience about violence and the law enforcement system, but cowboys and the Old West were too far removed from the mentality of the 1960s to serve as effective vehicles for conveying a positive image of the police and the law enforcement system. By 1964, Westerns had diminished to four, and within ten years they had completely disappeared. So, to strengthen its socializing role during this era of social unrest, television created a new series of socializing programs with violent protagonist characters to suit the new anti-segregationist mood which was beginning to sweep the country (TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition, 1960-1976).

In these new violent TV shows, every social and racial group was represented. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, Indians, women, elderly, youth, and handsome and ugly characters were transformed into heroes who fought to maintain the status quo. "Ironside," "Longstreet," "Barnaby Jones," and "Cannon" proved that the handicapped, the elderly, and the overweight could also be heroes. "I Spy" and "Mission Impossible" broke the color line, while "Police Woman," "Charlie's Angels," and "The Bionic Woman" attempted to silence feminist criticism. The message was clear: Anyone who defends the status quo can be a hero, and will be given social sanction to use violence and even deadly force. This is the broad conceptual framework within which the relationship between television violence, the black superhero, and the political socialization of the African-American must be understood.

THE VIOLENT BLACK SUPERHERO

During the 1950s blacks were virtually excluded from television. When they did appear, it was usually as entertainers, bumbling idiots such as Stephen Fletcher, or devoted servants such as Rochester in the "Jack Benny Show" or Willie Best in "Life of Riley." The only series in which blacks starred was

"Amos 'n Andy," a program deriving from an older radio show, in which the characters were so insulting that the NAACP demanded that it be taken off the air (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1979; Clayton, 1961).

At the peak of the civil rights movement, blacks demanded that their image on television be changed from the demeaning stereotypes of the 1950s. Television responded with the creation of the violent black superhero. Since the introduction of the "I Spy" series in 1965, blacks have been portrayed as violent superheroes—who defended the white establishment—in over 95% of the dramatic series in which they have been regularly featured. Northcott et al. (1975) found, in a study of the TV portrayal of blacks and women, that blacks were cast as policemen more often than any other single occupation. Even in the seemingly innocent show "Julia," the connection between blacks and the law enforcement system was firmly established. Julia was employed by the Defense Department; and the photograph of her husband, who had been killed in Vietnam, found its way into most programs. Her best friend's husband was a policeman, too (Clark, 1969). It is indeed ironic that blacks, who have benefitted least from American society, should find themselves overwhelmingly portrayed on television as the superguardians of that same society.

Surprisingly, the classification scheme used in our initial analysis of violent TV superheroes—agents, independents, and surrogates—was not very useful in the more detailed examination of the role of *black* TV superheroes. Because of the large numbers of blacks who were portrayed as directly employed by the law enforcement system at one level or another, a classification system had to be developed which would allow a more concise occupational description of the black superhero. Table 4 provides a selective sample of programs that featured the violent black superhero.

Ten of the thirteen shows listed in Table 4 featured black heroes who were agents directly employed by the military or some organization devoted to law enforcement at either the local, national, or international level. In the other three shows,

TABLE 4
Selected Programs that Feature Violent Black Superheroes

Program Classification	Name of Series	Performer	Character's Occupation
POLICE:	NYPD	Robert Hooks	Detective
	Ironside	Don Mitchell	Detective
	Rookies	George Brown	Policeman
	The Mod Squad	Clarence Williams	Policeman
	Get Christy Love	Teresa Graves	Detective
INTELLIGENCE:	I Spy	Bill Cosby	Spy
	Mission Impossible	Gregg Morris	Spy
ARMED FORCES:	Hogan's Heroes	Ivan Dixon	Soldier
	Land of Giants	Dan Marshall	Co-pilot (future setting)
	Star Trek	Michelle Nicholas	Communications Officer (future setting)
	Julia	Diahann Carroll	Nurse for Defense Dept.
INDEPENDENT AGENTS:	Shaft	Richard Roundtree	Private Investigator
	Outcasts	Otis Young	Bounty Hunter

SOURCES: Clark (1979); and TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition.

the blacks were indirectly connected to the police force. This meant that the violent black superhero operated under the *specific* orders of whites, and was expected to carry out his or her duties within the traditional constraints of the law enforcement system. "Shaft" and "The Outcast" were the only independents listed in our sample, and these independent law enforcement officer heroes were portrayed as superguardians of the white establishment who acted with at least the tacit consent of the law enforcement system. The activities of "Shaft" provide a typical example of the escapades of the black independent. Shaft operated primarily in the white world, where he used his wit to outsmart clean-cut, white-collar-type thieves and other similarly portrayed criminals. For instance, in "The Capricorn Murders" episode, Shaft followed "the

bloody trail of ruthless executives and the priceless necklace they stole" (TV Guide, 1974: 49).

It is of signal importance that *there were no black surrogates* among the violent black TV superheroes; and it is essential to note that surrogates operated completely outside the bounds of traditional law enforcement, and used their own judgement in defining injustice and tyranny. The total absence of surrogates among black heroes suggests that TV was fearful of encouraging vigilantism among African-Americans. Instead, by keeping black heroes closely linked to the law enforcement system, TV conveys the message that blacks can use socially sanctioned violence only when they are operating in defense of the status quo and are acting under the direct orders of whites.

The absence of invincible superheroes such as Superman, the Bionic Woman, Wonder Woman, or the Hulk among the violent black TV heroes is also significant. Gerbner and Signorielli (1979) argue that TV violence represents a demonstrated measure of power among social groups: Who can get away with what against whom? How secure are different social types when confronted with conflict and danger? What hierarchies of risk and vulnerability define social relations? The invincible superhero represents the ultimate status and source of power in the symbolic world of television violence. Because of the invincible character's awesome power and superhuman force, all other characters are dwarfed by their presence. No matter how violent and aggressive a black TV hero might be, he or she would be no match for a white invincible superhero: Superman would overpower Shaft; Wonder Woman would overpower Christy Love; the Hulk would overpower Scott (Bill Cosby). Thus, even when cast in the role of social superguardians, blacks are not given the same status and power as their white counterparts.

In 1974, "Hawaii Five-O," "Police Woman," and "Kojak" introduced a new genre of black hero: the criminal who has turned informer and supports the law enforcement system. In these programs, black pimps, prostitutes, and dope pushers were recruited as informers to aid—unbelievably—in the

struggle against crime. In exchange for collaborating with the police, these black criminals were given immunity from prosecution and were even allowed to continue their illegal activities. Because of the success of such programming, the black pimp and hustler as police informer became regular stars on "Baretta" and "Starsky and Hutch." The social message in these programs seemed to be that black criminals who cooperate with the police will be allowed to remain on the streets and to continue to prey on black people. That television would take this type of black criminal, who usually commits black-on-black crime and has a very low status inside the African-American community, and somehow transform him into a heroic character, was worse than ironic: it was an insult to black community values. Historically, school teachers, lawyers, doctors, ministers, and businessmen have held the highest status in the black community. Policemen, on the other hand, have held low occupational status in the black community (Miere and Rudwick, 1976; Brown, 1974), because the police have generally been viewed as extensions of the white power structure that oppresses black people. No black pimp, hustler, or dope pusher-type criminal would ever be likely to be accorded hero status by the African-American community merely for collaborating with the police.

According to historians Berry and Blassingame (1982), blacks in the 1960s and 1970s viewed the police as a white alien army occupying their neighborhoods. Although blacks made up between 27 and 63% of the 1970 populations of Detroit, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., for example, they represented only between 5 and 21% of the police forces in those cities; and the overwhelming majority of the police in these urban areas were white males who lived in the suburbs. As Benjamin Ward, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Police Department, said in 1973, "Blacks in America are jailed first and bailed last. The police discretionary power is used least in the ghettos. Police there are viewed as an army of invaders, and in turn, the police often view black people as inferiors" (Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

White police not only viewed blacks as inferiors—they also frequently beat and killed them. During the 1920s, according to historian Arthur Raper, 50% of the blacks killed by whites were murdered by white *Policemen.* A Department of Justice study of reported cases of police brutality against private citizens from January 1, 1958, through June 1960, found that out of 1328 such incidents, 461 (34%) were against blacks (Berry and Blassingame, 1982). The novelist James Baldwin accurately describes black attitudes toward the police in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961):

> The only way to police a ghetto is to be opppressive. None of the Police Commissioner's men, even with the best will in the world, have any way of understanding the lives led by the people they swagger about in twos and threes controlling. Their very presence is an insult, and it would be, even if they spent their entire day feeding gumdrops to children. They represent the force of the white world, and world's criminal profit and ease, to keep the Black man corralled up here, in his place. The badge, the gun in the holster, and the swinging club make vivid what will happen should this rebellion become overt. . . . He moves through Harlem, therefore, like an occupying soldier in a bitterly hostile country, which is precisely what, and where he is, and is the reason he walks in twos and threes.

In the world of television drama, however, the violent black agent and independent heroes were curiously color-blind in their approach to law enforcement. When other African-American characters challenged the status quo, they were suppressed and "brought to justice" by the black superhero policeman or agent. The black TV policemen and superspies were devoted to the maintenance of law and order, domestically and internationally, and in their world there were no blacks or whites, just allies and opponents of the status quo in general and the white elite establishment in particular. The philosophy of the black violent TV superhero was clearly put forward in an early 1970 "Dragnet" show in which Dale Evans, a black policeman, tells a group of would-be police recruits why he joined the department:

> I wanted to do something for my country. . . . I wanted to do something for my own people. . . . And I'll tell you something else, some of our people talk about the white man's law. There's no such thing; not when Black men like you and me wear this uniform—it's everybody's law [Clark, 1969: 21].

Such explicit verbalizations of regulatory themes are only one part of the complex aggregate system of messages that was designed to legitimize the status quo and to get blacks to identify with the white establishment.

In the mid-sixties and seventies, TV sought to allay the suspicions of the black community and convince them that the police were really their friends. For example, in the February 10, 1970, episode of "Felony Squad," Sam and Jim attempt to capture thieves in a neighborhood that has little friendship for the police. In the end, the police emerge as "good guys" who help people (TV Guide, 1970d). In several other violent series of this period, including "The Mod Squad," "Get Christy Love," "NYPD," "Rookies," and "Ironside," the black viewing audience is asked to accept the policeman as its hero. Furthermore, in the world of television violence, the black law enforcement officer as an occupational type was also glorified and glamorized. He or she was portrayed as a heroic, successful, middle-class person, and the character always achieved a happy ending. Because of such character portrayals and storylines, black children may grow up wanting to become cops or superspies (DeFleur, 1969). In other words, violent TV programs may encourage blacks to view "police work" as a highly esteemed occupation and a realistic way out of poverty and the ghetto. In the context of the limited career opportunities for African-Americans, violent TV programming featuring black police heroes attempts to promote police work, along with sports and entertainment, as glamorous but attainable (and "acceptable") routes to middle-class status and the good life. It is also interesting that these shows were aired at time when affirmative action forced a number of police departments to recruit black policemen.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that *violence is not randomly projected on television.* Rather, television violence is systematically presented within a framework which suggests that people have an unquestioned moral and/or legal right to use violence, including deadly force, to protect the status quo. Consequently, television dichotomizes violence into narrow legitimate and illegitimate usage categories. In the first category, heroic violence that is used to defend the white establishment against evil forces is glorified and its users transformed into superheroes. On the other hand, aggression against the status quo is vilified, and users of violence in this category are cast as evildoers who must ultimately meet with tragedy.

Because of their history as victims of oppression and exploitation, and especially because of their tradition of militancy and struggle, African-Americans have been a specific target of TV's efforts to control social conflict and change. In these efforts, black characters in violent TV programs are generally portrayed as policemen or collaborators with the law enforcement system, and these black TV personalities are projected as superheroes and social role models for black youth—even though there are no policemen or informers in the pantheon of real-life African-American heroes. Indeed, those blacks who have committed black-on-black crimes, or who have emulated whites, collaborated with oppressive power elites, and betrayed their own people, have been held in contempt by the black masses. Television, therefore, has attempted to portray as superheroes the very individuals who have historically been the most despised and hated in the black community (Levine, 1981). By presenting the black policeman, the black independent police ally, and even the black pimp-turned-informer, as superheroes, and the law enforcement system as the colorblind and altruistic guardian of all "decent" citizens in a democratic, just, and peaceable kingdom which is threatened by a few rotten bad guys, and/or a few hostile foreign countries, TV seems to be attempting simultaneously

to discourage the black community's historic struggle for social, political, ane economic reform, and to encourage instead black identification with the white establishment. It is within this framework of political socialization via character portrayals and storylines, that violent television programming can be seen to act as an instrument of social control.

NOTES

1. In this study, violence is broadly defined to include antisocial activities which range from abusive or threatening language or gestures to the taking of a human life; and, in the context of this article antisocial behavior means any attempted disruption of the status quo, i.e., of established social, political, and economic institutions. The intent or capacity for violence is considered as important as an actual act of violence: for example, if a law officer or other person carries a gun but never uses it, he or she will still be considered a violent character.

2. This is not to deny that exposure to TV violence may stimulate aggressive behavior among a small group of television viewers. However, the increments in violent behavior possibly caused in these individuals by watching TV hardly seems to justify the vast number of studies this subject has produced. This disproportionate focus seems all the more out of balance in light of the many historical and sociological studies which have concluded that joblessness and the worsening of living conditions are the primary factors responsible for violence and crime among ordinary people.

3. Deadly force is defined in this paper as any form of violence which knowingly leads to the killing, or significant risk of killing, of another person.

4. Barnouw does not use the term docudrama.

5. Because the "age of revolt" (a term coined by historians) had ended by 1976, and the era of cable TV had emerged by this date, 1976 was selected as a cutoff date for this study. The analysis used in this section of the study was based on the viewing of a number of episodes of widely watched prime-time TV show series that featured violence. The shows used in this study were originally aired between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m., Monday through Sunday. A number of series no longer being produced were viewed as reruns on daytime television. Descriptions of all series presented in the Tables in this article were studied in the program section of *TV Guide*.

6. A number of these TV shows also have movie counterparts, and their characters are reinforced by the firms that are selected for TV presentation, and by "made-for-TV" movies.

7. *TV Guide: Southern Ohio Edition,* Vol. 17, November 16, 1969a, A-32.

8. Ibid., Vol. 18, January 7, 1970a, A-66.

9. Ibid., Vol. 17, November 11, 1969b, A-57.

10. Ibid., Vol. 18, January 24, 1970b, A-12.

11. Ibid., Vol. 18 January 26, 1970c, A-23.

12. Ibid., Vol. 18, February 8, 1970d, A-30.

13. Ibid., Vol. 18, January 24, 1970e, A-10

14. Ibid., Vol. 18, January 26, 1970f, A-26.

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Henry Taylor is an Assistant Professor of History and Black Studies at the Ohio State University. He is also Director of the Cincinnati Urban Studies Project, which is studying the relationship between the city building process and the formation, growth, and development of black Cincinnati between 1802 and 1980. Professor Taylor's publications include, "Toward a Historiography of Black Urban History," Afro-Americans in New York Life and History, *July, 1980.*

Carol Dozier is a communications specialist who has worked with Roselyn Carter's White House press staff and is currently the Public Information Officer for the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, Columbus.