



Savage Pastimes: A Cultural History of Violent Entertainment

Harold Schechter

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Does violence in movies, on television and in comic strips and cartoons rot our children's brains and make zombies-or worse, criminals-of adults at the fringes? In this cogent, well-researched book, American pop-culture expert Harold Schechter argues that exactly the opposite is true: a basic human need is given an outlet through violent images in popular media.

Moving from an exploration of early broadsheet engravings showing torture and the atrocities of war, to the depictions of crime in "penny dreadfuls," to scenes of violence in today's movies and video games, Schechter not only traces the history of disturbing images but details the outrage that has inevitably accompanied them. By the twentieth century, the culture vultures were out in full force, demonizing comic books and setting up a pattern of equating testosterone-fueled entertainment with aggression. According to Schechter, nothing could be further from the truth. He also blasts those who bemoan the alleged increased violence in media today, and who conveniently scapegoat popular entertainment for a variety of cultural ills, including increased crime and real-life violence. Though American pop culture is far more technologically sophisticated today, Schechter shows that it is far less brutal than the entertainments of previous generations.

Savage Pastimes is a rich, eye-opening brief history that will make you rethink your assumptions about what we watch and how it affects us all.

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