

Toy Guns and the Reverberation of Reality

Children Still Want Them, But Parents Are Worried

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Nathaniel Blandon has two young sons, and so a pre-Christmas Saturday morning finds him in a predictable place: in front of a shelf of toy guns.

"Try Me! Pull Trigger!" pleads one box at the Langley Park Toys "R" Us. "Survivor Shot. When you're hit—you feel it," promises another. There are Uzis, rifles, assorted pistols. There are Desert Shield Seven Piece Combat Sets and Official Police Play Equipment Enforcement Sets. Bright and plastic, they are for many parents the physical embodiment of a painful dilemma.

"It's impossible to get away from it. Guns are a part of the life now," Blandon is saying with the resignation of a man describing something utterly beyond his control—the weather, or the passage of time.

Guns are, indeed, a part of life in a way they never were before. Even though the question of whether to let children play with toy guns is not new, in the past several years it has taken on a grisly new relevance as real weapons have shot their way into more and more lives.

Every day 10 children in the United States die after being shot by handguns, according to the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. Kids carry weapons into schools. In certain Washington neighborhoods, children are no longer surprised to see bodies bleeding in the streets, and even



BY JOEL BOWER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

those not directly faced with guns and death see the prevailing mayhem every day on the news.

Blandon will probably buy a play weapon or two this season. Others will resist their kids' yearnings. Either way, it most likely will be a decision they make without much discussion, for the debate over toy guns has about it the air of anachronism. Like the idea of raising TV-free children, it

seems a remnant of the '60s, born of the belief that we could engineer a generation of pure little pacifists—the true flower children.

Times changed. The cowboy and his trusty .45 faded into the sunset. Psychologists said the problem wasn't that boys were being allowed to play with toy guns, but that girls weren't. People start-

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complainants who do not give their consent.

Most news organizations—including USA Today, the New York Post, New York Daily News, CBS and Court TV—said they planned to use Bowman's name. The Associated Press moved a story identifying her yesterday, and CNN broadcast her name and picture last night.

Bowman, the stepdaughter of Michael G. O'Neil, a director and former chairman of General Tire, now called GenCorp., gave emotional testimony for nearly 10 hours at Smith's trial. But CNN and Court TV used electronic devices to shield her face and also bleeped her name, although it slipped through occasionally.

Bowman's local paper, the Palm Beach Post, published her name and picture yesterday after receiving permission from Roth. "I really am thrilled she came forward," says Editor Edward Sears. "I wish she had done it earlier." He says that "the only way the stigma is going to be erased" is for "courageous women" to identify themselves in rape cases. "There is definitely a stigma involved in rape, whether we like it or not."

Roth told the Palm Beach paper that Bowman would not speak to any newspapers, although he left the door open to a magazine interview.

The media contretemps began in April after the Globe supermarket tabloid, followed by NBC and the New York Times, used Bowman's name. Supporters argued that the media should treat rape like any other crime and should not shield Bowman's identity while constantly naming Smith.

Florida authorities prosecuted the Globe for violating a state law, but a judge ruled the statute unconstitutional. The Times, which stopped printing Bowman's name after harsh criticism from the public and much of its own staff, did not plan to use it today.

Times spokeswoman Nancy Nielsen says the paper will not "make a

news judgment" until after the ABC broadcast because Bowman "could change her mind." But, she says, "if there's no longer any privacy to protect, then it's moot."

The Washington Times began identifying the woman last week, saying it has a policy of naming rape complainants once a defendant is acquitted.

Frank's Little List

When "The McLaughlin Group" asked for an advance peek at "JFK," the controversial Oliver Stone film that is being screened for dozens of reporters this week, Stone's publicist quickly made the arrangements.

Then super-lobbyist Frank Mankiewicz got involved. Suddenly there was room only for the show's resident liberals, Jack Germond and Eleanor Clift. As for right-leaning John McLaughlin, Fred Barnes and Morton Kondracke, they were told they could wait until the film opens and pay their seven bucks.

"I was flabbergasted," says Allyson Kennedy, "McLaughlin's" producer. "My blood is boiling over this thing." Says Barnes: "I don't know why they assume liberals are going to be more amenable to Stone's conspiracy theory. This is incredible spin control to get favorable coverage."

Mankiewicz makes no apologies for his selectivity. "I didn't see any reason to invite people who I thought would savage the movie. . . . I didn't invite people I thought would politically prejudice it or were naturally disputatious and petty," he says.

Mankiewicz says Stone will be at the press screenings, and "I don't want to take up a lot of his time with hostile questions."

The Hill and Knowlton official has reason to be cautious. Stone's cinematic view that President Kennedy was killed by a right-wing/CIA/military conspiracy has taken a beating in the press. The latest critics are New York Times columnist Tom Wicker and a Newsweek cover story, "The Twisted Truth of 'JFK'—Why Oliver Stone's New Movie Can't Be Trusted."

Newsweek's Clift says she asked Mankiewicz if she could bring her husband, Thomas Brazaitis of Cleveland Plain Dealer, to the screening but was told no—it was meant to be a small gathering. Clift found herself in the huge Cineplex Odeon West End with only a half-dozen guests and no heat. "I was huddled under my coat," she says. "The popcorn machine wasn't turned on yet."

The "McLaughlin" folks wanted to discuss the film on this weekend's show. But Mankiewicz says the movie is "too serious for TV" and that Clift and the Baltimore Sun's Germond were invited because they are writers. He dismissed the notion of ideological criteria as "baloney," saying such conservatives as George Will and James Kilpatrick were also invited.

Mankiewicz admits his method is "arbitrary and capricious. . . . I felt good about A and didn't feel good about B. Isn't that the way every Washington host makes up a list?"

Latest Chapter 11 Chapter

Staffers at the New York Daily News have grown a little tired of reading about their imminent demise.

So the News, which filed for Chapter 11 reorganization after the Robert Maxwell media empire collapsed, changed the subject this week by firing a journalistic Scud at the New York Post. "The Post Is Crying for

Cash," a two-page headline announced. "Bankers: Post Sinking," said yesterday's installment.

Post owner Peter Kalikow, who has declared personal bankruptcy, is scrambling for \$5 million to help the tabloid pay its bills," the News reported. Citing court records, the News said Kalikow's creditors have strongly opposed his plan to lend the Post money from his personal assets.

Post Editor Jerry Nachman calls the stories "an understandable spasm by a group of scared people in a lifeboat." He says the Post has aggressively covered the News' woes because "their late owner appears to be nothing less than the biggest thief in the history of the world."

Kalikow spokesman Martin McLaughlin says the Post's cash-flow problems are minor. "We are going to make a profit this year, from January to December, for the first time in 12 years," he says.

News Managing Editor Matthew Storin says "I can't deny we have a conflict of interest" and that the story may have gotten a bit more "prominence" because "they're our rivals and our futures are probably entwined."

Nevertheless, Storin says, "The story is all based on court records. When [the Post] is filled with stories about us, and it turns out they are in a similar situation, basic journalistic values are involved."