



# Mayhem: Violence As Public Entertainment

*Sissela Bok*

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## **Mayhem: Violence As Public Entertainment** Sissela Bok

What is the effect of long-term media violence on our national character? Do we want four-year-olds watching slasher films? Who should decide? While almost everyone has a strong opinion about the profusion of violence-in film, TV, video games, and on line-paralysis sets in when it comes to action. The issue is seen as a hopeless standoff between free speech and preserving public morality. In *Mayhem*, Sissela Bok reframes the issue. She shows us that we have created a false dilemma and that we need not feel so helpless. *Mayhem* lays out the arguments and weighs the evidence on each side: the desensitization, fear, and addiction that concern psychologists, pediatricians, and religious groups on the one hand, and, on the other, the threat of censorship invoked by journalists, civil libertarians, and the entertainment industry. The book gives a vivid historical overview of the debate: from Rome, to nineteenth-century attempts to ban all theater, to censorship of the Internet in Singapore and China, and contrasting views of figures as diverse as Martin Scorsese, Bill Moyers, and Judge Bork. As in *Lying and Secrets*, she puts this thorny question in clarifying perspective, and shows how our ways of dealing with it not only express, but can shape our character and lives. Finally, she takes up specific and imaginative ways to resolve the dilemma, from private measures for individuals and families to large-scale collective efforts.

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