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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release       June 8, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THEATER OWNERS

The Roosevelt Room

1:55 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you won't be confused when I tell you that I have just met with the representatives of NATO, and we talked about the movies. (Laughter.) I am, of course, referring to a somewhat different NATO than we usually discuss around here -- the National Association of Theater Owners.

We had a very good discussion, and I want to thank NATO President, Bill Kartozian, and his colleagues who are here with him, for the efforts they are making to make sure that we work together to prevent youth violence, and the ways the theater industry, in particular, can help in that cause.

It has been less than two months since the tragedy at Columbine High School seared itself into our national consciousness. Ever since that day, our country has been moving steadily away from a culture of youth violence, toward creating the kind of future we want for our children. People from all walks of life are coming together in a national grass-roots campaign to prevent youth violence, to give our children the childhoods they deserve.
We all know that parents are the first and most important influences on their children, but we know, too, that the demands on them are increasing, and as more and more parents work outside the home, they have less and less time with their children. On average, families now have a life in which parents spend about 22 hours a week less at home than parents did a generation ago. Over the 18 years of a child’s childhood, that amounts to more than two years time.

Since my first days as President, we have worked hard to help parents better balance the demands of home and work. One of the ways we’ve tried to do that is to give parents better tools to make immediate but informed judgments about the shows their children watch, the music they hear, the video games they play. We’ve worked hard to give parents new tools like the V-chip, which by the end of next month will be in half the new television sets sold in America, and will help parents to block violent programming from their living rooms. We’ve also made progress on parental screening for the Internet and ratings for Internet game sites.

But we must do more. We must ensure that children are not the targets of violence in marketing. That’s why last week I asked the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to study the extent to which the video game, movie and music industries market violence to children, and whether those industries are abiding by their own voluntary systems of regulation.

For rating systems to work, they must also be enforced, not simply by watchful parents, but by retailers at the point of sales, and theater owners at the multiplex. The great thing about the multiplex is that there’s a movie for every member of the family, but not every movie is for every member of the family. When you drop them off, you shouldn’t have to worry about your G-rated kids getting into violent or suggestive R-rated movies. Too often children do get past the ticket counter, unescorted and under-age.

I’m pleased to announce today the theater owners are clearly drawing the line. The nation’s largest group of theater owners has asked -- has agreed to ask young people for IDs at R-rated movies. From now on, parents will know that the R-rating means what it is supposed to mean -- restricted, no one under 17 without a parent or guardian, and no exceptions.

Last month when I challenged the theater owners to step up to this responsibility I could only have hoped that they would respond so quickly. So, again, let me applaud Bill Kartozian, his organization and all their members for doing their part. I know we have parents here representing the PTA, and I want to thank them for coming, and I know they join me in applauding this action.
Let me also say that I hope that, as the recess ends, the Congress will do its part. Next week, the House will take up important legislation already passed by the Senate to help prevent youth violence by common-sense measures to keep guns out of the hands of children. They closed the deadly gun show loophole, required that safety locks be sold with every handgun, banned the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips, and banned violent juveniles from owning guns as adults. I strongly urge the House not to riddle this legislation with loopholes, or to delay, but to pass the law and pass it quickly.

Let me also say I hope others will follow the lead of the theater owners. In our growing national campaign to prevent youth violence, none can stand aside. None should stand in the way. In the weeks and months ahead, we will continue to move forward as one nation, striving to build that better future we all want for our children.

Now, I'd like to ask Bill Kartozian to tell us more about the steps the theater owners have agreed to take. Let's give him a big hand.

Mr. Kartozian. (Applause.)

Q Mr. President, are you optimistic on Kosovo?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm hopeful. You know, we're going to have -- we've got to have the military meeting and work out the details. But the G-8 statement is good.

Q And how quickly could the peacekeepers go in, do you think?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they're working out the details -- I hope shortly, we will know.

Thank you. (Applause.)
PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON

REMARKS ON

MOVIE RATINGS ENFORCEMENT

THE ROOSEVELT ROOM

June 8, 1999
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It was not even two months ago that the tragedy at Columbine High School seared itself into our national consciousness. But ever since that day we have, I think, moved surely and steadily toward the kind of future we want for our country. People from all walks of life are coming together in a national grassroots campaign to prevent youth violence and to give our young people the safe childhoods they deserve.

We all know that parents are the first and most important influence on a child. But we also know that the demands on parents are increasing. As more and more parents work outside the home, they have less and less time for their children.
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That includes the Congress. I hope members will step up to their responsibility – for the sake and the safety of our children. This week, the House will take up important legislation, already passed by the Senate, to help prevent youth violence.
This includes common-sense measures that close the deadly gun-show loophole; require that safety locks be sold with every handgun; ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips; and ban violent juveniles from owning guns as adults. I strongly urge the House not to riddle this legislation with loopholes, but to pass it into law, and to pass it without delay.

I hope others will follow the lead of these theatre owners. In our growing national campaign to prevent youth violence, none of us can stand aside, and none of us should stand in the way. Our national campaign is gathering members and gaining momentum.
And in the weeks and months ahead, I believe we will continue to move forward as one nation, striving together to build a better future for all our children. Thank you.

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That includes the Congress. I hope members will step up to their responsibility – for the sake and the safety of our children. This week, the House will take up important legislation, already passed by the Senate, to help prevent youth violence. This includes common-sense measures that close the deadly gun-show loophole; require that safety locks be sold with every handgun; ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips; and ban violent juveniles from owning guns as adults. I strongly urge the House not to riddle this legislation with loopholes, but to pass it into law, and to pass it without delay.

I hope Congress will follow the lead of these theatre owners. In our growing national campaign to prevent youth violence, none of us can stand aside, and none of us should stand in the way. Our national campaign is gathering members and gaining momentum. And in the weeks and months ahead, I believe we will continue to move forward as one nation, striving together to build a better future for all our children. Thank you.

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Last month, when I challenged theatre owners to step up to their responsibility, I could only have hoped they would respond so quickly. I want to applaud Bill Kartozian [kar-TOE-zhan] and his organization for doing their part. [I also want to thank Senators Hatch and Leahy for the work they have done on this issue.] Every one of us has something to contribute.

The Congress, too, must step up to its responsibility — for the sake and the safety of our children. This week, the House will take up important legislation, already passed by the Senate, to help prevent youth violence. This includes common-sense measures that close the deadly gun-show loophole; require that safety locks be sold with every handgun; ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips; and ban violent juveniles from owning guns as adults. I strongly urge the House not to riddle this legislation with loopholes, but to pass it into law, and to pass it [swiftly — I hope].

I hope Congress will follow the lead of these theatre owners. In our growing national campaign to prevent youth violence, none of us can stand aside, and none of us should stand in the way. Our national campaign is gathering members and gaining momentum. And in the weeks and months ahead, I believe we will continue to move forward as one nation, striving together to build a better future for all our children. Thank you.

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PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS ON MOVIE RATINGS ENFORCEMENT
THE ROOSEVELT ROOM
June 8, 1999

Now, I hope it won't confuse anybody when I say that I just met with representatives of NATO and we talked about the movies.

I'm referring, of course, to a somewhat different “NATO” than usual - this time, I'm talking about the National Association of Theatre Owners. We had a very good discussion. I spoke with NATO President Bill Kartozian and his colleagues about the ways creative and committed people are working together to prevent youth violence, and the ways the theatre industry in particular is stepping up to its responsibility.

It was not even two months ago that the tragedy at Columbine High School seared itself into our national consciousness. But ever since that day we have, I think, moved surely and steadily toward the kind of future we want for our country. People from all walks of life are coming together in a national grassroots campaign to prevent youth violence and to give our young people the safe childhoods they deserve.

We all know that parents are the first and most important influence on a child. But we also know that the demands on parents are increasing. As more and more parents work outside the home, they have less and less time for their children. Parents in the average family now have 22 fewer hours each week to spend at home than parents did a generation ago.

Since my first days as President we have worked hard to help parents balance home and work. One of the ways we've done that is by giving parents better tools to make immediate but informed judgments - about the shows their kids watch, the music they hear, and the video games they play. We have worked hard to give parents new tools like the V-Chip, which, by the end of next month, will be in every new television set sold in America, and will help parents block violent programming from their living rooms. We've also made progress on parental screening for the Internet and ratings for Internet game sites.

But for ratings systems to work, the ratings must be accurate; and they must not be undercut by the industries that apply them. That is why, last week, I asked the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to study the extent to which the video game, music and movie industries market violence to children - and whether those industries are abiding by their own voluntary systems of regulation. Children must not be targets in the marketing of violence.

For ratings systems to work, they must also be enforced. Not just by watchful parents, but by retailers at the point of sale, and by theatre owners at the multiplex. Still, too often,
children are making it past the ticket counter – underage, unescorted, and unquestioned. And too often, people have chosen to look away rather than turn these children away.

But today, I am pleased to announce that a powerful group has agreed to draw the line at the theatre doors. By checking IDs for “R”-rated movies, theatre owners will now make the “R” rating mean what it is supposed to mean: “Restricted.” No one under 17 admitted without a parent or guardian. No exceptions. No excuses.

Last week, when I challenged theatre owners to step up to their responsibility, I could only have hoped they would respond so quickly or resoundingly. I want to applaud Bill Kartozian and his organization. I also want to thank Senators [Hatch and Leahy] for the work they have done on this issue.

[As I have said, there are others who must step up to their responsibility – for the sake and the safety of our children. This week, the House Judiciary Committee will take up important legislation, already passed by the Senate, to help prevent youth violence. This includes common-sense measures that close the deadly gun-show loophole; require that safety locks be sold with every handgun; ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips; and ban violent juveniles from owning guns as adults.]

[I strongly urge the House not to riddle this legislation with loopholes. They should act to pass it into law – and should act quickly. There is no call or excuse for delay. Every day of delay is another day for the NRA to muscle Members of Congress into killing a good bill. In recent days, the NRA has fought to defy the growing consensus for common-sense gun laws, and to defend the indefensible idea that criminals should be able to buy guns at gun shows, no questions asked. The gun lobby is also trying to muzzle gun representatives who came here a month ago and supported our proposals. Let me be clear: those representatives of the gun industry took a stand for what is right. They should be singled out for praise, not targeted for retribution.]

I strongly hope the Congress will resist the pressure tactics of the gun lobby and step up to its responsibility. In our great national effort to prevent youth violence, none of us can stand aside, and none of us should stand in the way. Our national campaign is gathering members and gaining momentum. I think today’s commitment by the theatre owners demonstrates that plainly. And in the weeks and months ahead, I believe we will continue to move forward as one nation, striving together to build a better future for all our children. Thank you.
THEATRE OWNERS ANNOUNCE NATIONAL MOVIE RATING ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

For Immediate Release
Washington, D.C., June 8, 1999

Contact: Bill Kartozian, NATO President
(818) 306-1778

Today, the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) announced a new, three-part campaign to enhance compliance with the industry's voluntary movie rating system. The campaign will include a national ID-check policy for admission to "R" rated films, an education outreach effort to parents and community organizations, and the industry's endorsement and assistance with a national study of the causes of teen violence.

William F. Kartozian, President of NATO, stated, "The motion picture exhibition industry participates in a voluntary movie rating system so that parents receive the information they need to ensure that children see films appropriate for their age. We have worked hard to educate our patrons about the ratings system and to encourage our members to be vigilant in enforcement. For over 25 years movie theatre owners have turned away millions of dollars in business by participating in this voluntary system. It is important to understand that the success of this voluntary system is a combination of efforts—the efforts not only of NATO's members, but also parents and the community working together to support this system and learn more about how to effectively use the ratings as a tool. We are pleased today to reaffirm our commitment to the rating system and the parents it serves."

The National Association of Theatre Owners is a national trade association that represents 65% of the motion picture screens in the United States, with over 20,000 screens located in every state in the union. The details of the new campaign are attached to this statement.
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THEATRE OWNERS
RATINGS ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

The National Association of Theatre Owners announces a new, three-part campaign to enhance compliance with the industry's voluntary movie rating system. The new campaign will include a national ID-check policy for admission to "R" rated films, an education outreach effort to parents and community organizations, and the industry's endorsement and assistance with a national study of the causes of teen violence.

Purpose

The movie rating system is a voluntary system sponsored by the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) and the Motion Picture Association of America to provide parents with advance information on films, enabling the parent to make judgments on movies they want or do not want their children to see.

Previously, NATO has undertaken a variety of programs designed to enhance compliance with the rating system, including: weekly ratings bulletins for retention at the box office so that parents have access to the information; ratings updates and articles in the industry's trade magazine; brochures and posters for use by NATO members and the public; a ratings training videotape for members to use with their employees; and a slide presentation about the ratings system for in-theatre programming. The new, three-prong campaign is designed to complement these ongoing efforts.

1. National ID-Check Policy

The movie rating system currently requires that patrons seeking admission to "R" rated films be seventeen years of age, or be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

NATO reaffirms its cooperation with the parents of America to seek to ensure that young people view age appropriate movies. All of its members should require photo identification at the box office of young patrons not accompanied by a parent of guardian seeking admission to "R" rated films.
NATO will encourage all of its members to post notices reflecting the "R" rated film admission policy, and to require photo identification for any young patron not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

2. Education Outreach Effort

NATO has begun to consult with the U.S. Catholic Conference, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and national parent organizations regarding the ratings system and the new ID-check policy. NATO will reach out to these groups, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), and any other interested organizations to develop additional educational programs designed to enhance the ability of parents to make informed choices about the movies their children see.

3. National Study of the Causes of Teen Violence

In the context of new legislation on juvenile crime, Congress may require a study of the causes of teen violence, including the role of the entertainment industry and many other potential factors, to be conducted either by federal agencies or by a national commission. NATO endorses a national study of the causes of teen violence. NATO will also conduct its own study and provide any results to the appropriate officials or commission members. Again, NATO will reach out to the MPAA, academicians, parent groups, religious organizations and others to generate information and seek solutions which may be helpful.

Interested organizations or individuals with questions about the NATO campaign should write to NATO at 4605 Lankershim Blvd., Ste. 340, North Hollywood, CA 91602.
MEMORANDUM

To: Tom Freedman, Richard Socarides
From: John Fithian
Date: June 7, 1999
Subject: NATO Announcement

As you prepare for the possibility of a White House announcement of our new movie theatre ratings enforcement and education campaign, I write to provide you with some information. Obviously, we are excited about the possibility of working with you and the President. We hope you can schedule something for tomorrow, although we are very aware of the President’s schedule demands.

If you cannot do it tomorrow, we may announce the campaign on Capitol Hill with selected congressional leaders of both parties. We need to role this out tomorrow for several reasons. First, information regarding the possibility of a new theatre program has begun to leak out. Second, the House begins consideration of its juvenile crime legislation this week.

Enclosed with this memorandum is the final draft of our statement and campaign description. Obviously, this is embargoed until tomorrow.

Possible participants for the event include the following:

- Mr. William F. Kartozian, President of the National Association of Theatre Owners Danville, California. Bill will be traveling to D.C. today.


- Mr. Michael L. Campbell, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, NATO, Regal Cinemas. Knoxville, Tennessee. Regal operates over 4,000 screens nationwide.

- Mr. J. Wayne Anderson, R/C Theatres Management Company. Reisterstown, Maryland.

- John Fithian, Washington Counsel, NATO. Partner, Patton Boggs, LLP.
If you decide to go forward with a White House announcement, I will provide you with further details about our attendees.

For the announcement, we will have our statement and campaign description, and blown-up visuals of a drivers' license and a mock-up of a theater box office poster regarding the ID check policy. We have researched state ID policies and have found that every state except Massachusetts offers either a driver's license by age 17 or a state photo identification card by age 17. (Massachusetts currently offers both a driver's license and an ID card only at age 18.)

Thank you for your interest in this program. I await further directions from you.

Attachment
Cc: Bill Kartozian
But on this question, these economists did reach a conclusion, one that conforms to common-sense and common experience. They found that because more and more parents were working outside the home, they have less and less time for their children. The percentage of married mothers in the work force has nearly doubled in a generation, from 38 percent in 1969 to 68 percent in 1996. Because more mothers are working outside the home, and because the number of single parent families has grown -- listen to this, because this will be your life -- parents in the average family now have 22 fewer hours each week to spend at home, that's nearly one full day less time per week for parents to devote to their children. That means by the time a child reaches the age of 18 in today's world those 22 hours a week amount to over two years more the parents are away from home.
When Gus Kerasotes converted his ice cream counter into a movie theater in 1909, he held on to his ice cream scoop, just in case.

But neither Gus Kerasotes nor the two generations following him have ever had to consider resorting to it.

Eight decades later, the opening of a single nickelodeon -- the Royal Theatre at 214 S. Sixth St. -- has spawned two Springfield-based theater chains. Combined, Kerasotes Theatres Inc. and GKC Theatres operate 788 movie screens across the Midwest.

Gus Kerasotes, however, was never confident about the longevity of the film industry. He always worried the public would find another novelty it preferred more.

But the demand in Springfield was strong enough to open the Savoy Theater at 106 S. Sixth St. a couple years after the Royal's premiere. The Strand Theater soon followed at 100 S. Sixth St. and then the Senate Theater at 509 E. Monroe St.

Gus Kerasotes built the business in Springfield with his sons in tow, learning the inside of the trade.

His oldest son, George Kerasotes, remembers his duties ranged from sweeping the basement floor to handling the ticket counter. Former Gov. Henry Horner would come every week to catch the latest Western flick.

"He said it relieved him of all the pressures of running the state," said George Kerasotes, now president of GKC Theatres.

The shows may have changed, but the experience hasn't.

"There's something I can't explain about sitting in a dark room and seeing images move across the screen," said Tony Kerasotes, president of Kerasotes Theatres. "That experience can't be replicated on a television."

Brother and business partner Dean Kerasotes added: "It transports audiences to a different time, different setting. It has the ability to engross people completely."
When George Kerasotes joined the family business full time in 1933, he envisioned Kerasotes Theatres reaching beyond city limits.

In 1937, he bought the Beverly Theatre in Peoria. After the Beverly paid for itself, he turned his attention to buying up theaters in smaller towns such as Highland, Chillicothe, Havana and Canton.

There were 11 theaters in the Kerasotes chain by 1945. The number of family members helping run Kerasotes grew along with the business's expansion with Gus' younger sons -- Louis, Nicolas and John -- soon on board.

Drive-in theaters were the next trend in the industry. Kerasotes operated 72 open-air screens at the peak of the craze, with two in Springfield.

After World War II, the entire film industry went through a boom. George Kerasotes helped organize the United Theatre Owners of Illinois in 1947. This affiliation led to a membership in the Theatre Owners of America, the forerunner of the modern National Association of Theatre Owners.

George Kerasotes was elected president of the national organization in 1958. This position meant he was shaping more than just the Midwest moviegoing experience.

He served on the Motion Pictures Association Code Authority, the movie industry's equivalent of the supreme court on matters of censorship. And when 20th Century Fox Studio threw a star-studded luncheon for visiting Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev, George Kerasotes and his wife Marjorie were in the audience.

George Kerasotes later said Khrushchev delivered as strong a performance as any of the big-screen stars in the room.

Kerasotes Theatre Inc. was ranked as the nation's ninth-largest theater circuit in 1985 with 220 screens.

Later that year the business split, with George Kerasotes leaving the family business to form GKC Theatres. The senior Kerasotes brother started his business with 75 screens formerly operated by Kerasotes Theatre.

Brothers Louis, Nicolas and John continued operating the remaining screens under the name Kerasotes Theatre Inc. By this time, Louis' sons Tony and Dean and John's son Denis had joined the family business.

Kerasotes Theatre took an aggressive rebuilding step in March 1988, when Kerasotes Theatres bought 22 screens -- including five in Springfield -- from General Cinema Corp. The purchase made Kerasotes Theatres the only place in Springfield to watch a new release.

Expansions of Kerasotes and GKC now places both businesses in the nation's top 20 theater chains.

Kerasotes Theatres operates 468 screens in the Midwest -- including 29 in Springfield. A multiplex sketched for Wabash Avenue will add 16 screens.
Ground is scheduled to be broken at the site this summer.

GKC has seen similar growth focusing on smaller markets. There are 320 GKC screens spread throughout Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Arizona. Coming attractions for the next two years include an additional 40 screens. GKC's The Palace -- a 10-screen theater in Bloomington -- opened last month, and a similar development is scheduled for Lincoln next year.

GRAPHIC: File/SJ-R / Photo courtesy of the Kerasotes family: Above, Gus Kerasotes in 1938. At left, George Kerasotes stands with a new rocker seat to be installed in the Capital City theater in an undated photo. / Gus Kerasotes opened the Royal Theater at 214 S. Sixth St. in 1909. 3 PHOTOS

TYPE: NEWS

LOAD-DATE: May 5, 1999
About NATO

NATO National Association of Theatre Owners

The National Association of Theater Owners is the largest exhibition trade organization in the world, representing more than 14,000 movie screens in all 50 states, Canada, Australia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Mexico, Belgium, Colombia, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany.

Its membership is comprised of the very largest chains in the nation as well as hundreds of independent theatre owners.

Headquartered in the greater Los Angeles area, NATO operates in close proximity to the most important forces in the American entertainment industry.

NATO's location facilitates, among other things, Exhibition's ability to interact with motion picture distributors on all matters of mutual interest and concern, including emerging technologies, legislative activity, marketing, and First Amendment issues.

The association itself is governed by an executive committee and a board of directors, which are exclusively comprised of exhibitors who meet periodically to discuss the relevant issue facing Exhibition today.

Individual companies form NATO's core and direct its activities. They provide forums in which important issues can be discussed. NATO encourages all members to actively participate on the committees.

In addition, NATO's national headquarters maintains an efficient full-time staff which administers board policies and provide advice and information designed to keep members abreast of a continual stream of industry developments.

For more information, contact NATO at 4605 Lankershim Boulevard, Suite 340, North Hollywood, California 91602-1891, (818) 506-1778, Fax: (818) 506-0269.
Barrie Lawson Leeks was elected to the position of Chairman of the National Association of Theatre Owners at the annual membership and Board of Directors meeting last week in Denver, Colorado. The National Association of Theatre Owners is the largest trade organization in the film and theatre industry, representing over 18,000 screens and over 700 members. NATO co-administers the Rating and Classification Association, monitors all proposed regulations and legislation that may affect the theatre industry adopting industry positions and mounting lobbying efforts when needed, and also collects and disseminates industry data and plays an active role in evaluating new technology and developments in the industry. Barrie is the first woman to hold the chairmanship of the NATO organization.

William Kartozan remains President of NATO and Mary Ann Grasso continues to be Vice President and Executive Director of NATO. Barrie succeeds William Stembler as Chairman. Barrie Lawson Leeks is a magna cum laude graduate of University of Michigan Law School where she served as editor of the Michigan Law Review and garnered numerous other academic honors. Barrie is President and Co-owner with her husband Jim Leeks of Leeks-Star Theatres, a 143-screen theatre chain that is the fifteenth largest theatre circuit in the country. The Leeks-Star chain is known for its high level of customer service, innovation, and unique theatre designs, including its flagship Star Southfield Theatre that is now the most attended movie theatre in the entire country. The Leeks-Star chain is a partnership between the Leeks and Loews Cineplex Entertainment, Inc. Barrie and Jim Leeks served as Co-chairmen and Co-CEOs of Sony/Loews Theatres from 1992 to April 1998 when Loews merged with Cineplex Odeon to form Loews Cineplex Entertainment, Inc. In June of 1998 Barrie and Jim Leeks received the honor of the Michigan Entrepreneur of the Year award. This program has honored successful entrepreneurs since 1989 and recognizes entrepreneurial companies, based on their operating growth, employees, and revenue. It is sponsored nationally by the Entrepreneur of the Year Institute, USA Today, the NASDAQ Stock Market, and Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership.

SOURCE Leeks-Star Theatres

additional information, contact Krys Bylund of Leeks-Star Theatres at 616-940-0866.
PR Newswire, December 1, 1998

CONTACT: Krys Bylund of Loeks-Star Theatres, 616-940-0866

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 2, 1998
MEMORANDUM FOR JOSH GOTTHEIMER

FROM: SETH GROSSMAN

SUBJECT: CHILDREN AND MOVIES

- In a study by the *Kansas City Star*, all of the “test subjects,” who were under 17, were able to buy tickets to an R-rated movie although several of the movie chains in the area insisted that they always enforce the ratings restrictions. (Article 1)

- A *New York Times* article also found that the ratings restrictions are inconsistently enforced. In one case, a movie theater clerk sold tickets to the R-rated “12 Monkeys” even after the ticket purchasers, who were themselves only 14 and 15, admitted they were buying tickets for other children ages 12, 11, and 8. (Article 2)

- A study found that boys between 10-14 unanimously rejected an imaginary movie rated G; but when the same movie was described with an R rating, more than half wanted to see it. PG-13 movies had a similar effect. It also found that the most aggressive kids were most likely to favor R-rated films. (Article 3)

- Fewer than 10 percent of movies are rated “G” or “PG.” (Article 4) and over 60 percent of all movies are rated “R.” (Article 5) However, children and teenagers makeup the largest demographic group of moviegoers.

- There were 16 R-rated teen films in 1998 and there have already been 10 this year. (Article 6)
No parent? No guardian? No problem; An 'R' rating is supposed to keep unaccompanied kids out of the movie. Guess what? It's far from foolproof.

BYLINE: EDWARD M. EVELED, Staff Writer

BODY:

It's a packed Friday night at a local movie theater. The 7 p.m. crowd presses toward the box office as the rush-hour moviegoers head for the exits.

Elizabeth Hornbeck is 15. Cole Hooper is 14. Their assignment: Buy a ticket to an R-rated movie.

Elizabeth, who is wearing a Bishop Hogan High School jacket, gets to the front of the line, steps up to a window and requests one ticket to the R-rated "Birdcage." The clerk, in a hurry, hardly looks up. Elizabeth is in.

Cole, lanky and baby-faced, approaches a different clerk. She asks him to show an ID.

"I forgot to bring it with me," he says.

"OK, but be sure to have it next time."

Cole is in.

According to the Motion Picture Association of America rating system, an "R" rating means no one under 17 is admitted without an adult. Several movie chains in the Kansas City area maintain that they strictly enforce the restriction, which is not a law, but is used voluntarily by the movie chains.

Teen-agers, however, say it isn't so. Teens interviewed for this story say they often aren't challenged at the box office. Even if they are, it's a fairly simple matter for them to get into the movie anyway. Elizabeth and Cole were admitted to AMC's Ward Parkway 22.

Mary Ann Grasso, executive director of the National Association of Theater Owners, a trade group that represents many movie theaters across the country, thinks the teens are bragging.
"My guess is that for every kid who gets in, there are 10 who
don't," she said.

The Kansas City Star, with the help of a group of high school
students involved in the paper's TeenStar program, decided to test
the teens' claims.

Elizabeth, Cole and four other TeenStar members - all younger
than 17 - were given money to buy tickets to R-rated movies while a
Star reporter looked on. If they were sold tickets, they presented
them to the ticket-taker for admittance. They did not actually view
the movie. The test, admittedly limited, took place over 10 days in
March.

Next attempt: On a weeknight at SouthGlen 12 at 119th Street and
Metcalf in Overland Park, moviegoers trickle in to the multiplex
operated by the Dickinson Theatre chain. There's very little waiting
at the box office.

Lindsey Burch, Eden Balsly and Heather Long, three 15-year-old
girls, step up to the box office. They also choose "Birdcage." Each
is sold a ticket, no questions asked.

Finally, on a dead quiet Tuesday night at the Bannister Mall
cinemas, few people are going to the movies. Bryan Truta, who is 16
and tall, walks up to the United Artists box office a few minutes
after 7 p.m., the time the R-rated "Executive Decision" is
scheduled to start. One clerk is on duty, and no other customers are
in line.

Bryan asks for a student ticket to the film, but the clerk says
student prices aren't available. He then asks for a regular adult
admission and she sells him a ticket.

Three movie chains, six attempts, six "successes."

Hard to enforce?

Although controversies arise about the ratings on particular
movies, the movie-rating system has become an accepted part of the
country's cultural landscape. So much so, in fact, that television
executives recently announced a plan to devise a similar system for
TV shows.

Though not perfect, the rating system is seen as a valuable guide
for parents, a voluntary system that protects children yet avoids
government intervention.

In fact, concern continues to grow about the effects on young
people exposed to graphic violence, sexual content and objectionable
language in movies and on television.

In practice, though, the "R" rating, depended upon to keep the
under-17 crowd out of objectionable movies, might not be living up to
its billing.

"If they appear to be less than 17, we do challenge them," said Bill Burnett, vice president of operations at Dickinson Theatres. The ticket-sellers "are instructed to check IDs."

Further, Burnett said, theater staff frequent the auditoriums showing R-rated films to check for underage patrons.

When told that three 15-year-olds recently went unchallenged while buying tickets to an R-rated movie at a Dickinson theater, Burnett conceded that the system is hardly foolproof.

"It does happen. I can't prevent that," he said. "It's a voluntary system. We ask people to respect it."

Phil Singleton, executive vice president and chief operating officer at AMC, said in a written statement that AMC supports the rating system.

"In addition, we must rely on parents to properly supervise their underage children's attendance at movies," he added.

"Besides carding patrons who appear under age, we voluntarily monitor auditoriums the best we can while being careful not to compromise the customer satisfaction of our other patrons.

"I can assure you that we will re-examine our own internal policies and procedures to support this system."

Repeated calls to the United Artists chain were not returned.

Of course, it's a rite of passage for teen-agers to try to get past society's various age restrictions, from cigarettes to alcohol to movies. So in real life, many teen-agers don't give up if denied a ticket. They simply buy a ticket to another movie and, once inside, switch auditoriums. Or they ask an older patron in line to buy a ticket for them. Both strategies, teens said, are quite effective.

Several teen-agers said they try to buy their tickets from the youngest clerks because they are less likely to check IDs. Some teens admit they have been nabbed for switching auditoriums, but that the crackdowns seem to come in short spurts. So the youngsters are cautious for a while, then go back to their sneaky ways.

"If people want to see an R-rated movie, they're not going to stop at an age requirement," said Heather Long, a 15-year-old student at Shawnee Mission East High School.

Grasso said the idea is to guide parents in deciding what their children should see, she said.

"I think theaters do a real good job," she said. "Parents need to understand there's a certain responsibility there."
Many of the younger teens themselves, of course, see the cutoff at age 17 as arbitrary. Heather Long says she doesn't notice much difference in maturity levels between 15- and 17-year olds.

"It's not like you're oblivious to what's going on," she said.

Teens argue that they have become more mature viewers at a younger age. They have experienced fairly easy access to adult material on television, especially cable TV, and at video stores.

And, some say, if you want to see the most popular movies, it's tough to avoid R-rated ones.

As for parents

What's a parent to do?

Heather's mother, Carol Long, said she usually doesn't object to her 15-year-old daughter seeing R movies. She was well aware that youngsters switch auditoriums to get around the age restriction.

Long does insist on knowing what Heather is planning to see and makes sure, if she hasn't seen the movie herself, to find out as much about the film as she can. And there are movies she considers unacceptable and asks Heather not to see.

Cheryl Finke, mother of Tiffany Finke, a 16-year-old at Notre Dame de Sion in Kansas City, also doesn't see all R-rated movies as inappropriate for her daughter. She said she looks less at the rating than the actual content of the film.

Like Long, Finke puts her foot down on certain movies because of violence or sexual content. John and Pam Enderby of Lenexa come down on the side of much stricter adherence to the "R" age restriction. They have four children between 12 and 18.

John Enderby, an associate pastor at Metro Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Grandview, said it's a tough balancing act between what the children want to see - and what all their friends are talking about - and maintaining values. He wants his children to understand his objections.

If a movie is chock full of senseless violence and bad language, Enderby said, he wants his children to ask themselves, "Is this going to help me be a better member of society?"

Joe H. Ford, a Kansas City area psychologist, said he is not worried about the ill effects on most 15-year-olds who see violent and sexual situations in movies, except in a vacuum. And that's the worry if parents ban certain movies, then teens sneak in and see them anyway.

The danger isn't that viewing a violent movie will spur them to
commit violent acts, Ford said. Rather they'll start to think of the violence as commonplace or normal when they should be outraged.

Ford believes the rating system's value is to alert parents, who then have the opportunity to discuss the material with their teen-agers.

"By the time a kid is certainly 15, maybe even 13, they're not going to see anything or hear anything in a movie that is not discussed with regularity among their peers."

GRAPHIC: Photo (color), A group of young people involved with TeenStar helped The Star test teen-agers' claims that they have no trouble getting into R-rated movies. From left: Bryan Truta, 16, Eden Balsly, Lindsey Burch, Elizabeth Hornbeck and Heather Long, all 15, and Cole Hooper, 14.; BRIAN CRITES/The Star

LOAD-DATE: April 03, 1996
BYLINE: By TRIP GABRIEL

THE TIME: A RECENT SATURDAY afternoon. The place: the Cross County Multiplex, a 10-screen theater with all-weather carpeting and a video-game nook featuring Tekken 2. The theater happens to be in Yonkers but could just as easily be in Any Burb, U.S.A.

The scene: the time-honored quest of adolescents to buy tickets to an R-rated movie, unaccompanied by a parent or guardian. Sometimes you get in, sometimes you don't.

On this day, anxious youngsters were lined up for tickets to "12 Monkeys," an R-rated film in which Bruce Willis is glimpsed naked in a shower and later blows away a thug with a hand gun, and "Sudden Death," which features Jean-Claude Van Damme using a Super Soaker-type squirt gun filled with lighter fluid to torch an enemy. The fact that theaters and movie studios, in their wisdom, hav' decided that adolescents are not old enough to choose to see such scenes gave this crowd not a moment's pause.

"I don't think anybody our age wants to see anything rated under R," said Kevin, a tall, scrawny 16-year-old.

Rafael, a baby-faced boy of 11, added with a shrug, "They show the same things on TV." He and his 14-year-old sister, Jennifer, in braces, were part of a group of seven hoping to see "12 Monkeys." At the ticket window, the oldest members of the group, who were 14 and 15 and did not look a day older, requested the tickets. The clerk asked the ages of the younger children. Jennifer, pointing to heads, said truthfully, "12, 11 and 8." The c'erk sold them the tickets.

So it goes in multiplexes around the country: the ratings, issued with black-and-white clarity and Olympian authority by the Motion Picture Association of America, the trade organization of the major Hollywood studios, are enforced in real life with a great deal of wiggle room. Ratings, which do not have the force of law, are based on a voluntary industry agreement intended to avoid government regulation of film content.

Studios and directors regularly tangle with the Motion Picture Association in noisy controversies over ratings given to specific films. But in the malls of America, where real money is slid through ticket windows, or across the counters
of video rental stores, what do the ratings mean in actual practice? Based on interviews with dozens of parents and teen-agers in the New York area and with leaders of national industry trade groups, it seems clear that despite the sanctimoniousness with which ratings are proferred, they do little to prevent young people from seeing inappropriate movies, for several reasons:

- To a teen-ager, an R is not so much a prohibition as a challenge; it rarely stops anyone with a desire to outwit the system.

- To many parents, the more cautionary ratings like R and PG-13 play little role in discouraging them from taking young children to adult-theme films, even those with graphic violence.

- In an era when adult entertainment is no longer confined to movie theaters but saturates the cultural landscape like the weather, young people turned away at the box office often need wait only a few months to rent the movie from a cooperative video store or catch it on cable.

How the System Works

Many Ratings, Much Indifference

Young people, of course, have always sneaked into the local Bijou, whether to catch a glimpse of Edward G. Robinson's blazing Tommy gun or the bikinied Bond girls of "Thunderball." But the issue of access to ultra-violent or ultra-salacious fare, from movies to pop music, has become far more important in recent years.

Implicit in discussions of ratings is the notion that society should shield children from images of deadly violence and casual sex because they are likely to breed antisocial behavior. It is an assumption endorsed by a majority of Americans in polls and a theme beloved by politicians from conservative Republicans to President Clinton. It will undoubtedly be raised anew this campaign season, fueled by studies like one released this month by the cable television industry, which discovered, to the surprise of few, that violence saturates television. The broad telecommunications law just signed by the President requires television manufacturers to include a computer V-chip so parents can block objectionable programs.

MANY SOCIAL SCIENTISTS say there is a convincing body of evidence that repeated exposure of children to screen violence will encourage, if not cause, real-life violence. But Hollywood disputes this conclusion, no doubt because of the implied consequences. It has no desire to see government restrictions on film content.

"We're not talking about Newtonian laws here," said Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association. "It's very, very murky. None of the studies has been able to pinpoint a causal link between watching an action picture and becoming a murderer or a rapist the way you can track that your lungs will become blackened if you smoke cigarettes.

"People get frustrated because of what they think are violent streets and want a quick fix. You can darken every theater in America or cut the wires of every television set, and you'll do zero to restore the moral center."
There is no legal penalty incurred by teen-agers, parents or theater owners who ignore the ratings, which Mr. Valenti had a major hand in conceiving 27 years ago. Nonetheless, most theater owners say they support and enforce them.

In response to questions about the subject, National Amusements, the owner of the Yonkers multiplex, where unescorted minors seemed to have no trouble buying tickets to "12 Monkeys," the company said in a prepared statement, "Our employees are specifically instructed to comply with the rating system."

Mary Ann Grasso, executive director of the National Association of Theater Owners, a trade group that represents 65 percent of movie theaters in the United States, said, "I think you'll find in most cases theaters are very stringent in their enforcement of the restrictive ratings like R and NC-17."

That is not, however, what many teen-agers say. They report wide variations in the way the R rating is upheld: Theaters owned by image-conscious national chains, such as Cineplex Odeon and AMC Entertainment, are more restrictive, whereas smaller independent theaters are more lenient.

Lewis, a 14-year-old from Darien, Conn, who like many teen-agers refused to give his full name when talking about skirting the ratings, ticked off a list of his local theaters and their permeability: "State Cinema in Stamford almost always lets you in; the theater in the Stamford mall is pretty strict; Darien Playhouse lets you in."

(Managers for the State Cinema and Darien Playhouse insisted that they did their best to enforce the R rating and said that if unaccompanied minors got in, it was because they found adults in line to buy tickets for them.)

Teen-agers say that older ticket sellers tend to be tougher, but younger ones often look the other way. Moreover, theaters seem to crack down selectively, depending on the content of individual R movies. For a "soft R" like "Four Weddings and a Funeral," which features a smattering of profanity, a theater might check identifications only lightly. But it will turn tough for a "hard R" like Oliver Stone's "Natural Born Killers," one of the most violent movies of recent years.

Few teen-agers, of course, line up to see a movie like "Four Weddings." Instead, they swarm like bees to pictures with a high body count and liberal nudity. "Broken Arrow," an R-rated picture that opened last weekend featuring decapitation by helicopter blade, fiery explosions and over-the-top slug-fests, is the latest must-see among teen-agers.

Because teen-agers are some of the most fanatic movie-goers, crucial to the success of many R-rated action films, one might assume that theaters have an economic stake in turning a blind eye.

"That's a popular notion," Ms. Grasso said, "but it isn't worth sacrificing the system for a couple of bucks."

Faced with a tough ticket clerk, teen-agers can often find adults to buy them tickets. And if all else fails, there is auditorium hopping. "You buy a ticket for 'Toy Story,'" explains Peter, 13, from Rowayton, Conn., "and walk back and pop into 'Showgirls.'"
Ms. Grasso did not dispute any of this. She even added one inconsistency of her own: Theater owners in the South tend to enforce the R rating more toughly than those in other regions. "I know, and I'm not going to lie, that kids get into R-rated films all the time," she said. "It's a rite of passage. When I was 14, that was my goal, and I think that's probably still the case."

When they so desire, theater owners are capable of rigidly controlling admission, as was demonstrated last year with the release of "Showgirls," a marathon of Las Vegas nudity, whose NC-17 rating meant that no one under 17 was allowed. Many multiplexes posted extra ushers at auditorium entrances to prevent movie-hopping. "We were very strict about checking ID's and told people before they got in line they would have to present ID's," said Marc Pascucci, a vice president of Sony Theaters, which manages about 850 screens nationwide.

How It Was
From the Code To NC-17

The National Association of Theater Owners tries to use educational campaigns to convince individual proprietors that it's in their interest to enforce ratings, reminding them of the troubled period before the current system began in 1968. Back then, a patchwork of local rating boards issued conflicting and often prudish restrictions, and owners were sometimes arrested for showing movies considered indecent in Muncie, Ind., that played without incident in Minneapolis.

In the same era, the studios began to flout their own archaic Production Code, which decreed in straitjacketing detail how to portray sex and violence. Michelangelo Antonioni's "Blow-Up," the first studio film to feature nudity, was denied Production Code approval in 1966 although M.G.M. released it anyway.

Two years later, in part fearing a government crackdown, the M.P.A.A. and the theater owners organization developed the current system, which has evolved into one with five ratings: G (suitable for the youngest viewers), PG (may contain some material unfit for young children), PG-13, (some material may be unfit for pre-teen-agers), R (children under 17 must be escorted by an adult) and NC-17 (no one under 17 admitted). The NC-17 replaced the X rating in 1990 with the intent of removing the X's stigma of pornography, a goal that has been only partly successful.

The studios belonging to the M.P.A.A. may release only rated films, but independent companies may distribute films without ratings.

The Video Market
No Ushers For Home Viewing

With the rise of the videocassette industry in the 80's, video retailers also endorsed the ratings. "We take them very seriously," said Bob Finlayson, a spokesman for the Video Software Dealers Association, which represents more than 20,000 stores. His organization sends members a "Pledge to Parents" stating that the store will enforce R and NC-17 restrictions. Some stores ask parents to sign a permission form allowing their children to take out R movies.

But many teen-agers say video stores can be just as permissive as movie
theaters. "If you look 10 they'll ask to see your parents, but if you're 13 or 14 they'll let you," said Brendan Mahoney, a 13-year-old from Darien who said he recently rented the R-rated "Johnny Mnemonic" on his own.

The ratings debate has become immeasurably more complex in the age of video and cable television. Whereas movies shown in theaters were once the primary source of "mature" images, now children who have never been admitted to an R-rated movie have probably seen plenty on a VCR or on cable.

Margie Ryerson, a mother of two teen-age daughters in Orinda, Calif., recalled objecting when her oldest, then a sixth-grader, was invited to a slumber party where the entertainment was a video of "Pretty Woman."

"I thought no purpose was served in having my pre-adolescent daughter see a movie about a woman who's a hooker and her romantic involvement with someone," Ms. Ryerson said. Even more surprising, she said, was that out of ten 11- and 12-year-olds, her daughter was the only one who hadn't already seen "Pretty Woman."

The Parents
They Too Are Offenders

Sometimes parents themselves are the problem. A scene common to many movie houses unfolded recently at the Crown Sono Regent in South Norwalk, Conn.: as ticket sellers diligently turned away unescorted 15-year-olds from R movies, a stream of far younger children, many as young as 4 or 5, were led in by adults to the same movies.

According to a study done for the M.M.P.A., 75 percent of parents with children under 17 find the ratings useful. Yet a surprising number of parents say ratings play little role in influencing what films they take children to.

In the popcorn line of the Crown Sono Regent, Angela Grant was waiting with her 6-year-old daughter, Morgan, to see the R-rated "Waiting to Exhale," in which four women discuss in frank detail the sexual ineptitude of men.

"I don't know what this movie's about," Ms. Grant said. "I'll cover her eyes, I guess, where she's not supposed to see."

Ms. Grant's boyfriend, Cleveland Keller, a self-described film buff, said that based on what he had gathered from television advertisements, he did not think the film was inappropriate for a 6-year-old. "I think the direction of the movie is done in great taste," he added.

Just about the only one who thought Angela was too young for "Waiting to Exhale" was her 15-year-old sister, Teka, who had already seen it. "But I'm not her mother," she said.

In the same multiplex, a couple escorting a girl of about 8 found their seats a few minutes into the wildly violent "From Dusk Till Dawn," just as George Clooney executed a lawman with a .44 and a liquor store burst into flames. Later, the rape and murder of a woman, glimpsed tied to a bed with blood spattering the walls, was played for sick humor.
Afterward, the couple with the young girl, Al and Stacey Johnson, did not seem disturbed that their daughter, Ashley, had seen such images. Ashley called the movie "stupid."

To Dr. Victor Strasburger, chief of adolescent medicine at the University of New Mexico Medical School in Albuquerque, exposing children to such films represents "a kind of electronic child abuse."

Dr. Strasburger, the author of the book "Getting Your Kids to Say No in the 90's When You Said Yes in the 60's," added: "I can't tell you how many time I've been tempted to walk up to a family in a movie theater and say: 'Here's 10 bucks. Get a babysitter."

GRAPHIC: Photos: Lela Rochon and Leon in the R-rated movie "Waiting to Exhale" -- Will parents cover their young children's eyes for the naughty bits? (Nicola Goode/20th Century Fox) (pg. 1); Jack Valenti defends the ratings. (Associated Press) (pg. 24); Julia Roberts, left, and Laura San Giacomo in "Pretty Woman" -- A movie about a prostitute is available to youngsters on cassette. (Ron Batzdorff/Touchstone Pictures) (pg. 25)
Memo to GOP Presidential candidates: Amid all the hand-wringing over what, if anything, should be done about such outrages as the Littleton, Colo., school shooting rampage besides, that is, arresting six-year-old boys for drawing pictures of guns! Here is something you could do:

On the first day of your Presidency in 2001, after the swearing-in and all the inaugural balls and celebratory fandangos, you could summon to the White House the heads of the major Hollywood movie studios, the CEOs of the big music companies, the top gurus of the Internet, the makers of video games, the cable TV executives.

The purpose of this invitation would be to have these executives defend their products and explain why they are good for the children of America, if indeed such a defense can be mounted.

The last thing we need is more laws, more government regulation, more nanny-state meddling. But this does not mean that, as President, you cannot hold the entertainment industry publicly accountable for the products it produces, especially as many of these are intentionally marketed to children. This would be an entirely appropriate way to use your bully pulpit.

Summon Disney's Michael Eisner to the White House and ask politely that he explain his formerly family-oriented company's partnership in Viewer's Choice, a pay-per-view purveyor of pornography carried by 250 cable TV outlets nationwide. Disney also owns Hollywood Records, which counts among its "artists" rock group Humble Gods, whose scatological lyrics could not be published in a family newspaper. Ask Mr. Eisner to read aloud the lyrics from some of Humble Gods' songs and explain why the company that Walt Disney founded had to go into the smut business. Have him explain what social or cultural good is served by Humble Gods' filthy music.

And have the executives of the big music companies, too, read into the public record, in full view of the TV cameras, the lyrics of Marilyn Manson and the gangsta rappers, lyrics that glamorize rape, murder, sodomy, Satanism, bestiality, necrophilia, torture and suicide.

You could ask the purveyors of video games to expound upon the redeeming social values of "Duke Nukem" and "Mortal Kombat." Perhaps they could explain
why it is appropriate for children to play the same explicitly violent video games that the U.S. Army uses in its training to desensitize soldiers to the taking of human life.

Were you to do this, of course, the civil libertarians would squawk and squeal about censorship and the chilling hand of government closing around the throat of artistic freedom.

Alan Dershowitz would go all purple in the face (that prospect alone makes this worth doing) and Jack Valenti would sputter about neo-McCarthyism. Oliver Stone would stomp up and down Pennsylvania Avenue muttering about right-wing government conspiracies, while Tommy Lee Jones and Woody Harrelson chained themselves to Whoopie Goldberg. Alec Baldwin might demand that you and your whole family be murdered. The ACLU would raise the specter of book burnings and brown shirts:

Great! Wonderful! You would not be able to buy at any price such publicity for your White House Conference on the State of the Entertainment Industry and American Popular Culture.

The Hollywood elite at first would resist your summons, but only for a while. After all, you would not be proposing any new laws. You would make it clear that the White House talk-a-thon would not result in legislation. You might even issue in advance an Executive Order denouncing government censorship and barring the Federal Communications Commission or any other agency from issuing new regulations based on the Presidential roundtable.

So how could the movie moguls say "No" to the President of the United States when all he wanted to do was talk? Presidential jawboning has a long history and ample precedent. It's pretty hard to resist when the pleasant voice on the telephone says, "This is the White House. Please hold for the President."

Some of the hard-core lefties might be inclined to snub you, but at heart these Hollywood types are publicity addicts. As soon as one studio exec decided to show, the rest would be elbowing each other aside to get a little face time on the nightly network news shows. Some might even get booked on Larry King.

This approach worked with the Big Tobacco executives. Congress called them in, put them on the hot seat and grilled them mercilessly over how their products were poisoning and killing our children. Did you see those guys sweat and squirm? Whew! After a few hours under the Klieg lights being lashed by such lightweights as Henry Waxman, they couldn't wait to get out their checkbooks!

You could point out that polluting the minds of children is just as heinous as poisoning their bodies.

Why is it, for example, that people fly into hysteria at the very thought of little Johnny sneaking a cigarette with his pals out behind the garage? But they do not give a second thought to exposing children to "Basketball Diaries," in which androgynous teenage heart-throb Leonardo DiCaprio blows away his classmates in gory, blood-spattering slow motion.

Here is another mystery your White House conference might be able to clear up
for a bewildered American people: The highest earning movies in Hollywood are those family-oriented films rated "G" and "PG." As critic Michael Medved points out, these are the real money makers.

Yet fewer than 10 percent of Hollywood's productions are geared toward this lucrative market. The overwhelming majority of movies are rated "R," even though they earn on balance less than the "G" and "PG" rated films.

Moreover, although children under 17 are not supposed to be admitted to "R" rated movies unless accompanied by an adult, children and teens make up the largest demographic group of movie-goers. Why, then, would Hollywood make so many more "R" movies, which kids are not supposed to see, than "G" and "PG" fare? You see, Hollywood tells us that it is driven solely by market forces, not ideology, and that the industry is merely giving people what they want. Perhaps you could point out to the Hollywood moguls that this is a bunch of hooey, that if market forces determined what the industry produced, we would have many more "G" and "PG" films than "R." Clearly, it is the sex-and-violence drenched counter-culture ideology of the producers and directors, and not marketing, that determines the kinds of movies Hollywood makes.

The power of public embarrassment should not be underestimated. If the mostly anonymous entertainment executives were made to answer publicly for the sludge they are peddling to America's children, then perhaps they would think twice about their corporate responsibilities and the demands of good citizenship. We cannot expect much from the hard-core pornographers, such slugs as Larry Flynt, but mainstream corporations are sensitive about their corporate images. Exposing to public scrutiny the smarmy side of their business dealings could be beneficial.

I offer this suggestion to you Republicans because it would be a perfect waste of time trying to persuade Al Gore of the need for such a conference. Mr. Gore's lips are firmly locked to the Hollywood teat and he has no intention of giving up the money flowing from all those liberal elites.

Remember back in the 1980s when Tipper Gore was leading the crusade against the smutty lyrics in rock music? Heard much from Tipper lately? She clamped up tighter than an oyster once hubby and Bill Clinton began to cultivate the Hollywood money. Expecting anything other than the most insipid generalizations about our debased popular culture from Gore, Inc., a wholly subsidiary of Hollywood, is a fool's hope.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 07, 1999
Seven of the 10 top-grossing movies of 1995 had ratings of G, PG or PG-13, indicating they were family oriented.

"For half [or more] of the films [that grossed the most sales] to qualify for more general audiences is pretty encouraging," said James Wall, editor of the Christian Century, a historic mainline Protestant journal.

"The box-office results are a good indication that audiences are looking for more peaceful experiences in the theater and that they respond to worthwhile films," added Mr. Wall, who has testified on movie content at congressional hearings.

Only three films near the bottom of the top 10 were rated R, meaning children under 17 had to be accompanied by an adult to see those pictures.

No films with the NC-17 rating, meaning children under 17 are not admitted, were among the top 10 this year, according to Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc., a California entertainment research organization that tracks such information.

"This shows that, for now at least, sleaze doesn't sell and that, over time," the movie industry "is moving toward general audiences," said Doug Besharov, a research scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

Michael Medved, chief film critic for the New York Post and co-host of "Sneak Previews," which airs on 244 Public Broadcasting Service stations nationwide, put it this way: "Sixty percent of all movies that are released are R-rated/yet only 30 percent of films in the top 10 and zero percent in the top six are R-rated... Samuel Goldwyn once said it's better to sell four tickets than two. That's common sense that the movie industry" is just now beginning to recognize.
Mr. Medved said the latest top 10 offers more evidence that "PG-13 is an easier rating to sell tickets on than R."

PG-13 means special guidance is cautioned because material may be inappropriate for ages 13 and under; PG means parental guidance is suggested; and G, for general audience, means all ages are admitted.

Jack J. Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, argues that movie grosses in 1995 rose or fell on the basis of a film's "entertainment value," not its rating and whether it was or was not a family film.

He said there was no shortage of family films produced this year, but there was a "shortage of family audiences." He noted there were "10 to 12 family films released this year that failed miserably at the box office."

One of those, he said, was "The Little Princess," which he described as a "wonderful, tremendous film" that few went to see. "The Little Princess" is about a young girl whose father, a distinguished British gentleman, goes off to battle in World War I. The child is enrolled in a private girls' academy in New York, where she suffers mistreatment by an abusive headmistress.

"The kind of films people claim they want in the marketplace, they don't patronize... This constant reference to wanting family films is hypocrisy," Mr. Valenti said in an interview.

The NC-17-rated film "Showgirls" was a box-office flop not because of its nudity and sex, Mr. Valenti said, but because it was a "mediocre film to begin with" and "the word got out it wasn't a very good movie." "Showgirls" depicted the struggles of an ex-prostitute who becomes a Las Vegas lap dancer and aspires to be a highly paid stripper.

Not everyone concerned about the content and quality of movie fare sees cause to celebrate this year's list of the biggest grossers.

Said Ted Baehr, chairman of the Atlanta-based Christian Film and Television Commission, which each year makes a thorough analysis of hundreds of films in a "report to Hollywood":

"Last year, 60 percent of the top 10 grossing films met our moral criteria. This year, it will be 40 percent with the list as it now exists. In other words, we've slipped... it's been a lousy year for movies."

Movies in last year's top 10 included "The Lion King," rated G, and "Forrest Gump," rated PG-13, which both have grossed more than $310 million. "Batman Forever," this year's biggest box-office smash, has grossed $184 million to date.

Mr. Baehr said "Hollywood was clearly aiming at children" when it produced films such as "Batman Forever," "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls" (No. 5) and "Casper" (No. 6). But he does not view those pictures as true family entertainment and describes "Ace," "Casper," and "Waterworld" (No. 9) as "irresponsible."

Of Jim Carrey's latest "Ace Ventura" detective comedy, Mr. Baehr said: "We
do not consider it to be a moral movie. It's racist and pro-masturbation, pro-sex and pro-buggery."

In "Ace Ventura II: When Nature Calls," Mr. Carrey goes to Africa in search of a great white bat. There he encounters a tribe whose members spit or release other bodily fluids on people to show their appreciation.

"It's clear Hollywood knows it has to broaden its horizons and make more films that will attract youngsters, he said. But many of these films feature "covert immorality" and take "philosophical positions most conservatives can't accept."

Mr. Baehr charged that the movie industry is "cutting back on [true] family films."

"If they make this a trend," they can anticipate a drop in attendance, he said. He added this is already being reflected in the smaller revenues that have been generated by this year's top 10 compared with last year's.

"People want films you can take the family to," Mr. Baehr said.

Mr. Valenti denied there is a conspiracy afoot in the movie industry, as Mr. Baehr suggests. "Eighty to 85 percent of all films made in Hollywood are put together by independent producers, who are fiercely competitive," he said.

John Krier, president of Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc., agreed. "These things go in cycles. Certainly, there is no premeditated plan to make a lot of kids pictures," he said.

As for the films that grossed the most this year, he said, "I don't think you'd call 'Batman Forever' a family picture. And 'Ace Ventura' is a little gross. There are some questionable scenes."

Mr. Wall offered this assessment of "Batman Forever": "It's a rather dark film, but I don't object to it very strongly. 'Apollo 13' [No. 2] was well done, one of the finest inspirational films for people of all ages."

Those interviewed had little enthusiasm for the movie "Pocahontas." Mr. Wall called it "adequate," while Mr. Baehr labeled it "New Age" and "annoying."

Mr. Medved said he "didn't like the film's political correctness."

GRAPHIC: Photos, A) "Batman Forever" (PG-13) gets lukewarm reviews from moral watchdogs.; B) The largely wholesome "E.T." (PG) remains the box-office champion. ; Charts, A) THE YEAR'S TOP MOVIES; B) ALL-TIME TOPS, Both By The Washington Times

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 29, 1995
Brett Finegold knows he wasn't supposed to see the movie "8 mm." The Nicholas Cage thriller is rated R because of nudity and violence, so no one under 17 is supposed to see it without an adult. Finegold is 16, and he saw it with friends.

"Sure, some scenes were graphic, he says, but nothing most teens can't handle. "Teen-agers know all the stuff in the movies before they see them," said Finegold, a sophomore at Deering High School in Portland. "I can't think of an R-rated movie that isn't appropriate."

Hollywood is banking on this way of thinking.

Teen-agers have been sneaking into R-rated movies for decades. In the '80s, it was "Porky's" and "Fast Times at Ridgemont High." What's changing is the sheer number of R-rated films aimed at kids that Hollywood is churning out. For young teens, R-rated movies (restricted for those under 17 without an adult because of sex, violence or language) are hotter and more plentiful --- and easier to get into --- than ever.

There were 16 R-rated teen films in 1998. There have already been five this year, and the next month will bring five more.

So far, we've seen a cheerleader wearing a whipped-cream ensemble (and nothing else) in "Varsity Blues," and we've heard explicitly raw sex talk in the current hit "Cruel Intentions." Those two movies are just the warm-up act.

The film most teen-agers are holding their breath for is "American Pie," coming in May. It's about four high school seniors who vow to lose their virginity by prom night, and it includes a scene that's so gross that it's bound to delight many teens.

"We believe we've made this generation's 'Porky's,'" said the film's producer, Warren Zide, without a trace of remorse or shame in his voice. "This movie is a little deeper than you'd imagine, but that will probably be lost on most, since we push the envelope further than any teen movie in recent memory."

It's no surprise that high school kids are going to R-rated movies: There's
action, there's sex, and there's the simple act of seeing something that their parents forbid them to see --- and which the movie industry pretends to forbid them to see.

Consider "Cruel Intentions," a remake of "Dangerous Liaisons." It stars Sarah Michelle Gellar, a teen sensation who stars in the TV show "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," and it's aimed squarely at the high school crowd, despite its R rating.

"It couldn't be more obvious that most R-rated movies are made for teens," said Finegold, the Portland 16-year-old. "There is a whole genre called 'teen slasher flick,' such as 'Scream' or 'I Know What You Did Last Summer,' that no one else would enjoy except for teens."

Filmmakers have been betting on the kids' ability to see these films.

Roger Kumble, the director of "Cruel Intentions," admitted he was counting on underage kids seeing his movie. Casting Gellar was like "dangling the carrot" in front of younger teens, he said. It worked. The movie earned $13 million its opening weekend.

For teen-agers, getting into R-rated movies is almost a rite of passage. And it's plenty easy, too.

"If we want to see an R-rated movie, there's no trouble doing it," said Megan Moulton, 15, of Alfred.

Employees at some movie theaters ask for identification, but it's easy to buy a ticket for a PG film and see an R one instead. At most theaters in southern Maine, there are no ushers posted at the entrances to each screen, so no one's the wiser if a kid buys a ticket for "Doug's 1st Movie" and walks into "Cruel Intentions."

"I don't think it's any surprise that young kids are getting into these movies," said Larry Kasanoff, chairman of the digital media group Threshold Entertainment and producer of the "Mortal Kombat" movies and James Cameron's R-rated "Terminator 2" and "True Lies."

"I remember seeing kids skateboard right up to the ticket counter when 'Terminator 2' opened and getting right in. Teen-agers have been doing this since time began. I remember sneaking into 'Emmanuelle' when I was 13, and it didn't kill me. I turned out OK."

These days, though, even the amorous Emmanuelle might blush when confronted with the adolescent activities in teen movies.

It all leads up to May 28 and "American Pie," although "South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut" in June promises to take bad taste to unimaginable heights as well.

"We wouldn't make a 'South Park' movie if it couldn't be rated R," said Trey Parker, who writes and directs the show with partner Matt Stone. "What would be the point? The same was true for 'BASEketball.' Otherwise, it would have been just another Pauly Shore movie."
Until recently, studios have been reluctant to allow teen movies an R rating. Horror films constitute an obvious exception, since there are few discreet ways to disembowel a human being. But with other teen genres, studio executives have typically pushed for a PG-13 rating in order to snare the widest audience.

Clearly, that thinking has changed, and the success of last summer's gross-and-grosser comedy "There's Something About Mary" has only hastened the process.

"It's as much a case of diversity as anything else," said Michael Costigan, senior vice president of feature production at Columbia Pictures. "There seems to be a divide between the 14- and 15-year-olds and, say, the 17- and 18-year-old audience, and what we're trying to do is find movies that appeal to both. To do that, you probably have to make them a little edgier."

"The thing about teen-agers," Costigan said, "is that they're probably the most sophisticated audience you have going to movies. If they see something they don't think is true, they turn off immediately and you lose them. So you need a feeling of real life in these movies."

And real life, or at least the kind being observed and portrayed by Hollywood screenwriters, has become a more sexually charged and explicit place for young people.

"I know parents are going to be upset, but I think they'd be surprised to find what teen-agers are really up to," Kumble said.

Chris Gray, who is 16, has seen the R-rated films "The Rage: Carrie II," "Shakespeare in Love," "Elizabeth" and "Very Bad Things." With some of these movies, it's hard to imagine what could be offensive or harmful to teens. "Shakespeare in Love" might show a little skin and a stabbing, but it isn't much more explicit than many movies on TV.

"I don't understand why you can't go into an R-rated movie but you can rent one with no problem," said Gray, who lives in Lewiston. "Maybe the R rating should just be a recommendation."
MEMORANDUM FOR JOSH GOTTHEIMER

FROM: MARA SILVER
RE: HISTORY OF MOVIE RATINGS
DRAFTED: 5:30 p.m. JUNE 7, 1999

• Wil Hays imposed the Hays code in 1930 with the general goal of boosting Hollywood’s image. The code was basically a list of dos and don’ts and hit gangster movies and musicals the hardest. The code regulated Hollywood films from 1930 to 1966.

• In 1968, the MPAA ratings were voluntarily established by the Motion Picture Association of America together with N.A.T.O. The system alerts parents by giving them advance notice of what material a film might contain.

--A chairman and 11 members (all of which are parents) rate the films, focusing on depictions of sex and nudity, drug use, language and violence.

--The ratings are purely voluntary and enforcement is up to individual theatres.

--The movie ratings code is recognized by most Americans and the MPAA finds that more than three-quarters of the parents with children under 13 think it's at least fairly useful.

--Cultural critics claim that such ratings stigmatize their work, making it undesirable to potential theatres.

--Parents/others have stated that the ratings are imposed by strangers and are hardly enforceable. According to these critics, stronger regulations are necessary.
This year marks the 30th anniversary of the movie rating system.

On Nov. 1, 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America voluntarily established the Classification and Rating Administration, together with the National Association of Theatre Owners and independent film distributors.

Its purpose?

To give parents an idea of what a film might contain so they can decide in advance if they want their children to see a particular movie.

The Classification and Rating Administration operates through a Film and Classification Rating Board and Appeals Board.

A chairman and 11 members - all of whom are parents who serve varying, short terms - rate the films submitted by moviemakers.

They look for theme, violence, nudity, sex, drug use, language and other areas that may be of concern to parents.

How various elements are used in the movie can also influence the rating.

Board members see films as a group, and after a discussion, vote on the rating.

CARA keeps their identities a secret.

The only connection between the MPAA and the rating board is that the chief executive officer of the MPAA and the president of the National Association of Theatre owners make up the Policy Review Committee which monitors the rating system.

The film rating system is voluntary, and not mandated by law.

Moviemakers aren't allowed to self-designate films using the G, PG, PG-13 and NC-17 ratings.
If a producer objects to a rating, or seeks a less restrictive rating, a review of the classification must be requested before the Ratings Appeals Board, which is composed of people from the sponsoring industry organizations. It takes a two-thirds vote to overturn a contested rating.

Producers have the option of re-editing and re-submitting their films in hopes of gaining a different rating.

Ratings enforcement is up to theaters since the system is strictly voluntary.
Just over three decades ago, when Lyndon Johnson was in the White House, four of the entertainment industry's top executives -- men at the height of their power in Hollywood -- found themselves in an argument over the movie "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

They weren't arguing the merits of the dramatic portrayal of the destructive, sadomasochistic relationship between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. They were arguing about "humps" and "screws."

Warner Bros. chairman Jack Warner, his right-hand man Ben Kalmenson, attorney Louis Nizer and newly appointed Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) chief Jack Valenti were locked in battle over the "hump the hostess" line that Burton recites in the Edward Albee classic and the utterance of the word "screw." That bit of dialogue, a violation of the Hays code, was preventing the MPAA from affixing its seal of approval and hence halting the movie's release.

Just two months later, another movie, the MGM production of the Michael Antonioni film "Blowup," was faced with a similar problem under the Hays code. This time it was brief nude scene. Since MGM was an MPAA member it couldn't release the film. It was released through a subsidiary in order to evade the code.

"I knew we couldn't go on like that, so out of that came the idea for a classification system," Valenti said. "We had to have some system in place to allow parents to decide what their kids could see."

Two years later, the MPAA ratings system was adopted. It meant the end of the old Hays Production Code. Will Hays, President Warren G. Harding's postmaster general, developed the code in 1930 while president of the MPAA's forerunner, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. It was basically a list of dos and don'ts.

The Hays code banned language like "nuths," except when it meant crazy, or presumably a food although it doesn't say. Jerk, jeez, nance, whore and tart were out. God, the Lord, Jesus and Christ were also banned, "unless used reverently."

While the tiered ratings system that followed was intended to get the MPAA out of the business of micromanaging movies, it was not immediately embraced
by the studios. Only after Valenti had won the support of the National Association of Theater Owners did they agree to the system.

"The studios didn't want it," Valenti said. "I must have gone to a hundred different meetings. I argued time and again that unless we did something in self-regulation the state and local governments were going to do it for us. There were 44 censorship boards operating at that time. I finally won the studios over and we started this thing on Nov. 1, 1968."

Thirty years old this month, the MPAA ratings system has become as much a part of the nation's cultural landscape as the movies themselves. The movie ratings code is recognized by most Americans and the MPAA finds that more than three-quarters of the parents with children under 13 think it's at least fairly useful.

Despite its success, the code is not without its detractors. Directors, producers and studio executives occasionally complain that the system misfires.

The latest controversy surrounds the NC-17 rating given October Films' "Orgazmo," from director Trey Parker. And the argument over the rating for this comedy about a young Mormon who finds himself playing the lead in a porno movie makes the argument over some words in "Virginia Woolf" appear downright quaint.

Putting the case against the NC-17 rating the MPAA gave the movie is Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, who was retained by October. Added to the code in 1990, the NC-17 rating prohibits the admission of children under 17.

"I generally support a ratings system that informs parents so they can make a decision, but that does not apply to NC-17. It's a censorship rating," he said.

Valenti, however, sees the ratings system as First Amendment-friendly.

"I was determined that whatever we did we would never force a creative author to delete or change anything on a film," he said. "I understand that directors, writers and producers don't want to change anything. For that you get a rating that puts on some economic restrictions:"

He dismisses the latest argument over "Orgazmo" as publicity mongering.

"It brings in free publicity," Valenti said. "If I were 'Orgazmo' I'd attack the ratings system."

Dershowitz denied that he and October are simply hyping their film.

"It's no publicity stunt," he said. "If he thinks it's a publicity stunt then there's a very simple way to make it go away. Give it an R and it goes away."

While the ratings system may still generate controversy after 30 years, it is unlikely to go away.

"I didn't design it to please directors and producers, but to please parents," Valenti said. "You don't last 30 years in this brutal marketplace unless you aid the people you want to serve, and those are the parents."
WASHINGTON -- After two weeks of finger pointing in the wake of the Littleton tragedy, many Americans think the media's use of violent images is to blame and the government should impose restrictions.

A USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll conducted over the weekend found that the public thinks the government should do more to regulate violence in every entertainment medium, with 65% saying the Internet deserves top priority -- over video games, TV, movies and pop music. Another survey out today from the Annenberg Public Policy Center finds that most parents are "deeply fearful" about the Web's influence on their children.

The findings come as lawmakers -- sensing a public demand for action -- meet today for testimony on "this marketing of violence, this culture of death and its impact," says Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan. He'll run the Senate Commerce Committee hearing. The father of three joined with nine other senators last week to call for a voluntary cessation of sales of Marilyn Manson albums and other music.

The hearing is one of many such meetings before Monday's summit at the White House. All this talk comes while the current voluntary ratings systems have allowed movies, records and video games that seem more violent than ever.

Blaming entertainment messengers is a trend that continues, decade after decade. In 1954, 70% of respondents in a Gallup Poll felt that comic books, TV and radio could be blamed for teen crime.

In 1977, 70% said there was a relationship between violence on television and the rising U.S. crime rate.

In the USA TODAY poll over the weekend, 73% said TV and movies share at least a little of the blame for teen crimes (the poll had a margin of error of 3 percentage points).

So could the Littleton tragedy result in tighter regulations and stricter policies and laws governing our culture? Will some degree
of violence in "art" become a crime?

To prepare for Brownback's hearing, the Recording Industry Association of America contacted John Karroll and his nonprofit organization Stop the Violence, Face the Music for materials. Karroll, who encourages artists to put positive messages in their music, says it would be difficult for Congress "to make a law telling them how to direct their art because there would be so many variables to target in that way. I don't know how they would ever word it."

But labeling has been enforced. Wal-Mart and Kmart, two of the nation's largest retail chains, which together account for 20% to 25% of record sales, don't carry any CDs with parental advisory labels. Only "clean" versions of songs are allowed.

"We listen to our customers and are interested in what they want, and this seems to work for them," Wal-Mart's Melissa Brown says.

Ratings and labels are "informative," singer/songwriter Carole King says. "They're a good thing." But beyond that, artists need to police themselves, she says.

Parents hold the key

When a tragedy occurs, "they talk about us (people in the media) like we dropped from the Mars space shuttle," says Cristina Saralegui, host of the top-rated Spanish language talk show.

But the mother of three says parents have to take an active part in their children's entertainment choices. "My 13-year-old boy is an Internet freak. I'll tell him, 'I know you're downloading porn.' Then we talk about it, we match wits."

She does not use an Internet blocker, nor does she favor tightened restrictions. "That's not going to happen," she says, because they don't work. "When I was little, I went to sexy movies in Cuba with a fake ID. Kids weren't supposed to be in the theater, but "where there's a will, there's a way."

The way to improve the system "is for parents to take a strong position with their kids and say, 'I don't want you to see this movie,'" says Maryann Grasso, vice president and executive director of the National Association of Theater Owners.

Joe Zanger, managing editor of PG-14, a Web site (pg14.com) and newsletter aimed at giving parents information on choosing movies, says the problem with the ratings system is that the line between R and PG-13 has become "hopelessly blurred." Zanger cites The First Wives Club as an example. "The theme of that movie was divorce and revenge. That's pretty grown-up stuff. But that film pulled a PG rating. Not even PG-13! However, we do not want to see a return to the days of censor boards around the country," he says. "Well-informed parents should make the decisions."
Zanger adds that many movies are "misadvertised," that moviemakers should make more family movies and that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) should wipe out "loopholes" like allowing producers to appeal ratings decisions.

MPAA chairman Jack Valenti concedes the ratings system has changed little in its 30 years of existence. But he doesn't think it needs to. "We can't have policemen with bayoneted guns in front of every household (to get them to follow the ratings)," Valenti says. "We can only put the ratings out there -- that is the most we can do in a democratic society."

Director Barry Sonnenfeld (Men in Black and the upcoming Wild Wild West) also thinks that the existing rating system is sufficient. "It lets parents and children know what kind of movie they are seeing. No more is necessary," he says. "I'm saddened and upset by the events in Littleton. But my feeling is that if Congress wants to help prevent violence, the issue is parenting and giving children a sense of place, love and support."

He adds: "It's funny. Personally, the Internet frightens me tremendously. But I can't imagine how we can place restrictions on it and still be America."

Guns and other factors

Producer Dick Wolf of the TV show Law & Order believes that "we're dealing with the outright hypocrisy of Washington, where many people are calling for steps against television. What about the guns out there? That's the real issue."

In agreement: longtime anti-censorship activist Bob Guccione, now editor and publisher of Gear magazine, who is protective of the First Amendment but not the Second. "Don't attack the abstract," he says. Today's hearings should be "about gun control and gun trafficking."

As for ratings, he argued against them 10 years ago. "They didn't work. We didn't need them. I was right." What is to blame: "social factors."

The pendulum on violence in the media needs to swing back, says James Alan Fox, dean of the criminology department at Northeastern University in Boston. Fox, who has spent more than 20 years tracking violence, expects violent crime by teens to increase.

Fox says there is little research on video games, which move players from being passive to being active killers. "Our kids are numb" to violence, he says. "They know the consequences, and they just don't particularly care because they have gotten used to it."

Mike Wilson, CEO of game publisher Gathering of Developers, feels that the video game and PC game industry -- and specifically, id software, his former employer -- is being assailed unfairly. Doom II was the first PC game to carry a rating. "We wanted
the rating," Wilson says. "We wanted people to know what Doom is before they buy it."

A father of two, Wilson says the evening news delivers more violence and more realism than PC games do. "If some network would come out with a show called The Good News, that would be a start. People would watch it. Companies would buy ads, and it would be 'follow the leader.'"

For now, it's up to retailers and parents to enforce ratings. Blockbuster, for example, carries R-rated movies and M-rated games (for mature audiences, 17 and older), but not NC-17 movies or AO (adult only) games. It also has a youth-restricted viewing feature on its membership cards. Parents can check a box to decide what can be rented to their children under the age of 17, Blockbuster's Liz Greene says.

Rather than opt for censorship, Northeastern's Fox suggests enforcing current ratings and treating violent content in the same manner as erotic or explicit content. "If you want to rent an erotic film, it's in the back room. But if you want to rent a violent film that is R-rated, the box is out in the open. It's very appealing to 14-year-olds in particular," he says. "The R rating is not enforced in many neighborhood stores. In fact, many of the people working behind the counter are not much older."

Is it art or is it news?

Andre Morgan, executive producer of TV drama Martial Law and co-creator of TV's Walker, Texas Ranger, says he and his partners have discussed what their responsibilities are. "The one continuing lesson we teach is that crime will not pay. But you also have to show that force will be met with force."

A summit is a good thing, he says, to look at the issues, such as, "If indeed it is true that violence in the American entertainment media influences viewers, then why don't we see this happening in countries in the rest of the world" where U.S. entertainment is a popular import?

Also, if violent images in the media are to be curtailed, Morgan says, "where do we draw the line? Do we ban CNN from showing the effects of bombing in Kosovo? Do we ban live TV of police chases? Is it OK if Wolf Blitzer is giving the narrative, but not OK if Chuck Norris is?"

Parents need to tell children how to "read" the messages conveyed through media, says Marjorie Hogan of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which offers tips-on-learning "media literacy" on its Web site (www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/media.htm). Parents need to sit down with kids and "comment on the violence and stereotyping (in the game or movie)."

The government could support media literacy efforts in schools, says Elizabeth Thoman of the Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.org).
"The need is to move from bashing or lamenting television to engaging it, exploring it, inquiring about it."

On April 25, 60 Minutes examined whether video games make kids violent. Experts told the newsmag they do. But that's not what students told producer Don Hewitt when he played principal for a day at a public high school in New York's Harlem. "They said videos have nothing to do with it, that the two kids who did it were warped, crazy," Hewitt says.

Hewitt says video games and movie violence are contributing to a more violent society. "I can't go to the movies anymore without seeing someone thrown through a plate-glass window, getting knifed or machine-gunned to death."

His answer?

Hewitt says concerned people should call and write the wives of top movie studio executives and say, "If you're worried about kids in school, maybe you should talk to your husband. Wives get things done."

Advocating more rules and censorship will only compound the sorrows of Littleton, novelist Tom Robbins says. The "wrong-headedness" of our reaction as a country is "almost as tragic as the event itself."

If "educators wish to prevent similar acts in the future," he says, "they had better be encouraging students to embrace those who dress in stranger hues rather than further punishing and alienating them."

Says Robbins, "When we start searching for someone or something to blame, we need look no further than our own hateful attitudes and the institutions (educational, political and religious) from which we are, sadly, still learning them."

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