

THE FACES OF VIOLENCE

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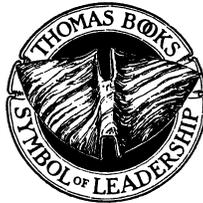
Second Edition

THE FACES OF VIOLENCE

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This book is dedicated to those people who helped me to become who I am.

FOREWORD

This, the second edition of *The Faces of Violence*, includes several new chapters. After an extensive discussion of the history, the biology, the psychology, and the sociology of violence, Dr. George B. Palermo, the author, discusses the psychopath, serial killers, sexual violence, domestic violence, mass murder, filicide and parricide, facilitators of violence, children and television violence, and he presents various crime statistics. Dr. Palermo has observed criminal violence for over twenty-five years and he is concerned about the absence in the United States of a coherent culture, its material obsession, the destructiveness of welfare, and the disintegration of the family. Dr. Palermo offers a lifetime of experience and observation about human nature that includes forty years in psychiatry and thirty years observing criminal behavior as a psychiatrist. He examines criminal cases as a forensic psychiatrist in the United States and abroad. He is well-known for his plain-spoken, unpretentious and objective testimony in the trial of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer.

Dr. Palermo argues that the upsurge of violence in our society is basically due to the lack of the formative influence of the family unit on its members, especially children and adolescents. He considers the family as the primary social agency. Poverty, drugs, access to guns, joblessness, poor education and inadequate housing are what he considers facilitating factors in crime. Many of the people whom Dr. Palermo sees who are accused of crimes do not know their fathers. They lack the stability that comes from an integrated family. At times, the family not found at home is found by them in a gang.

The welfare culture, he says, is a disincentive for families to unite as a single economic and emotionally supportive unit. With welfare, a mother and father are not encouraged to team up for the support of their children. At the same time, he points out, there is a culture of desire that makes people feel incomplete if they do not have all that the society offers materially. That encourages violence, as illustrated by the killing of children by children for a pair of sneakers or a jacket.

Dr. Palermo was born in Italy, the third of ten children. His passion has

been to observe America and to write and share his point of view, especially, of late, on violence. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* described him as “a sort of an Italian Alexis de Tocqueville, the nineteenth century French historian famous for his analysis of American democracy.” In 1996, he received the Citizen of the Year award from the Greater Milwaukee Legal Auxiliary; in 1997, the Person of the Year award from the Justinian Society of Milwaukee; and in 2002, the *Lex et Justitia Award* from the Marquette University Department of Criminology and Law Studies.

With a medical degree from the University of Bologna, he undertook a medical internship at St. Michael Hospital in Milwaukee in 1952. During his first years in the United States, even though a professional, he went through the usual vicissitudes of an immigrant. He completed residencies in general medicine and in psychiatry, and was then in the private practice of general psychiatry and forensics in Milwaukee from 1960 to 1969. He was and remains a major forensic expert for the Milwaukee County criminal courts. In 1969, he returned to Italy for a prolonged stay. While in Italy, he was the consulting psychiatrist for the International Hospital and for other American and Italian institutions. There, he taught at the Catholic University Medical School and at the University Gregoriana. He was closely associated with the late Franco Ferracuti. In 1988, he came back to America.

In 1955, he married Adriana, and they had five children, three girls and two boys, between 1956 and 1964. Three of them followed their parents into health care. Their oldest daughter is a pediatrician in Rome; their older son is a diplomate acupuncturist practicing in Denver; their younger son, after obtaining specializations in neurology at the Medical College of Wisconsin and in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, now practices in Rome; their second daughter is an artist and illustrator of children’s books in Switzerland, and their youngest daughter is a professor of foreign language and literature in Rome, where she works for the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.

Dr. Palermo is renowned as the poet-philosopher of Milwaukee psychiatry, a man of charm, good humor, and likability. He is enterprising, engaging, ebullient. He has written and lectured widely, not only in the United States but in many European countries and in distant lands such as Russia and China. He is Editor-in-Chief of *The International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, and is a member the Board of Directors of the International Academy of Law and Mental Health and a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Law and Mental Health*, as well as of other editorial boards. He is a Member at Large, Section of Forensic Psychiatry of the World Psychiatric Association.

This book is well-written and highly researched. It addresses the manifestations of violence with an unusual clarity and down-to-earth objectivity. In

this second edition, the literature has been updated, as have the statistics. Comparative statistical analyses reveal the decline of crime in the United States in the past ten years since the first edition. The book is pleasant reading and makes good points throughout. It will stand the test of time, a textbook that is marked by honesty of thought and moral nobility. It is a must for professionals in the psychiatric, criminological and forensic fields.

RALPH SLOVENKO

Editor

American Series in Behavioral Science and Law

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition of *The Faces of Violence* has given me the opportunity not only to rephrase, correct and highlight some passages that the enthusiasm for the first edition let me overlook, but a chance to update it and further reflect about crime. It is just this reflection that has confronted me with a stark reality: crime, even though fluctuating during the past decade, and at present in an apparent decrescendo, remains high, in spite of myriad attempts to curb it with new laws, new preventive measures, and frequent media indoctrination. It seems that some laws might have had only a minimal effect on the crime rate, and it is doubtful whether television programs are helpful in obsessively discussing crime. Indeed, the young and the adults who are to some extent predisposed to the effects of television violence may be somewhat stimulated in acting out by media discussions of the ways in which people perpetrate crimes.

Because of the continuing high frequency of crime, one is left over and over again with the sad realization that it is an intrinsic part of humankind, and that the many studies on the variables connected with it and measures introduced in an attempt to prevent it, have come up short of society's expectations of changing the rate of criminal misbehavior. Even though one may rationalize that at present society is still going through a transition period, or that some parts of it are in the throes of continuous social disorganization/reorganization, or that crime rates should be basically looked upon as a question of relativity, one is led to think that some people have a propensity for wickedness and evil, and that in some circumstances some of them give in to it. Evil behavior has many facets and is of many degrees. Although there is a tendency to dismiss the lesser antisocial behaviors, often described as misdemeanors, it cannot be denied that such behaviors often follow a continuum, from misdemeanors to increasingly vicious felonies, such as the evilness of mass murder and serial killings.

Scholars still attempt to explain whether antisocial behaviors are due to social factors, unemployment, age, intellectual capacities, poverty, or other factors. The reality is that only a small portion of people who are within the

limits of the variables believed to predispose to or to facilitate crime are involved in criminal behavior. The majority of the so-called “group at risk” does not commit crimes, and those who do so are seemingly unable to control their behavior, even though they are well aware of what they are doing and know that what they do is wrong. Even most serial killers know what they are doing; they just do not care to obey society’s rules and, like the others, place themselves outside of and above the law.

Offenders tend to be negative individualists, who arrogate to themselves unlimited power, disregard the rights of others, and commit crimes against them. They invade people’s privacy, they destroy their property, they undermine their security. Many of them, who claim to be searching for respect, do not realize that in disrespecting the rights of others, they disrespect themselves.

Although this book deals with crimes against the physical person, other forms of criminal behavior have recently appeared on the social scene, interfering with and taking advantage of recent technological advances from which society has greatly benefitted, such as Internet crimes and identity theft. White-collar crimes are more frequent and they should be pursued as serious criminal offenses. These crimes include the embezzlement by high-level corporation managers that have shocked society and destroyed the financial security of many. They are akin to social murder. Thus, violence not only has different manifestations, but, depending on the historical period, some of its forms become more emphasized. In this period, it appears that “ordinary” crime is declining, but the uncommon ones such as those mentioned above seem to be flourishing. That should make us reflect on the extreme adaptability of human behavior: Indeed, people easily adapt to new social opportunities, at times exploiting them for a criminal purpose.

Unfortunately, antisocial behaviors are not only the result of a psychopathic mind, but are frequently due to a basic natural tendency that is part of human nature, a distortion of the basic goodness that should be in each individual. Because of the evilness that takes the place of goodness, the social scene is replete with Cains, Othellos, Medeas, and the many other criminals who made history, and of many lesser criminals who act out and unconsciously emulate them every day. This book illustrates the various manifestations of their antisocial behavior.

I have added several chapters to the first edition of the book, in so doing widening the panorama of social violence. The book is full of facts and reflections, my thoughts and those of other scholars, past and present. I hope I have done them justice. Also, I want to think that my work will contribute to a better understanding of human behavior. As for myself, I am still of the opinion that the predisposition to violence finds its pabulum in the cradle of the family, and that the best way to combat it is to address it at its roots within the family unit.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Before accepting the invitation to write this book on violence, I wondered whether it would be redundant to further investigate a topic that has been the focus of so much writing during the past twenty years. However, my hesitation was overcome, first, by my personal interest in the subject, and second, by the realization that there is a lack of a global assessment of this issue in most of the very interesting papers and books that have been written about violence which I have perused. Most of what I read, while certainly enlightening, appeared to me to be one-sided and dispersive. In addition, I thought that this would give me the opportunity to raise some questions, and to introduce to others some insight derived from my professional experience and personal reflection.

During the course of my professional life, I have been intrigued by the possible reasons behind human acts of violence against other humans, either as an impulsive raptus or as the result of elaborate programming, and which reach, at times, destructive proportions. I have often wondered about the motivations of those people who break social taboos and direct their instinctive destructive aggression towards other persons, both known and unknown to them. I have reflected on the different perceptions of violence that people have, and on the distinctions that are made between crimes of violence that are committed during wartime—in wars both declared and undeclared—and the present day noncollective violence, highly disregardful of human life, to which we have become all too frequently involuntary witnesses, and to which we have also become gradually desensitized. I have been puzzled by the acceptance of these killings of masses of people for just or unjust social reasons, and the obvious nonacceptance of the killing of peaceful citizens by their unexpected murderers in their homes and on the city streets. Faced with the devastating effects of social and interpersonal violence, I ask myself, as we all must do, as individuals and part of the collectivity, why does such destructive violence exist? Is this human nature? What can be done about it?

The appreciation of human behavior—normal, abnormal, or deviant—calls for an analysis that should take into consideration the social context. The

suddenness, unpredictability and randomness of street violence, which is becoming ever more prevalent, is not only highly frightening, but disruptive of our daily lives, even more so than the frequent occurrence of domestic violence; it is the unexpectedness of street crime that makes it so frightening. These crimes against persons generally have dire consequences, physical or psychological, on both the individual and on the immediate family. Those of us who have had direct professional contacts with these unfortunate people are well aware of this, and it is certainly not difficult even for the reader who has not had this professional experience to appreciate the shattering effects of aggravated assault, rape, and murder. There is no doubt that the upsurge of the phenomenon of aggression in our society calls for a relentless search for a comprehensive understanding of its causes and, obviously, an attempt to find a remedy for them, or, better yet, a means for their eradication at the origins.

My intention in writing about violent behavior was not only to reassess the variables commonly accepted to be at its basis, but primarily to search for, and reflect on, whether there is a single, most important factor—a common denominator—at the origin of that violence against the person that is flooding our homes, our cities, and our country. A great number of scholars and writers have stressed, at different times and from various perspectives, the multiple factors at the basis of violence and crime in society at large and in American society in particular. However, it was my belief that this topic should be assessed from the point of view that considers the individual as an actor and as a reactor to various internal, external and environmental stimuli, a member of a social community that holds certain mores and values—mores and ethical values that determine the social conduct of each one of us when interacting with one another. Some of these values seem to have been with us from time immemorial; others, instead, seem to have a more fluctuating course, depending on the particular social or historical period. In order to better understand my approach, I would like to suggest that the reader visualize the individual at the center of concentric circles: the first is that of the family with its constellation of members; the second, that of the community; the third is that of society and its culture; and the fourth, that of the world at large—the cosmos, with or without the presence of an omnipresent cosmic power or a superior entity that many believers call God, and with whom many individuals have a silent spiritual relationship. This approach, will, I believe, give one a better dynamic view of the violent person.

I have limited my discussion principally to the problem of individual violence, bearing in mind that the variables so far addressed by many scholars, even though important in themselves, are, in my estimation, co-factors, or, as I prefer to call them, facilitators. Addressing these variables alone as the cause of violent crime has not, thus far, produced any great changes in the

frequency of crime in our society. The rate of crime has soared while these investigations have mushroomed throughout the recent years. Modern man, as well-stated by Dolf Zillmann, "in furthering his self interest has shown little reluctance to inflict pain, injury, mutilation and death upon his fellow man."¹ It seems reasonable, therefore, that a further inquiry and a global assessment of the behavior of the violent individual in his or her own social habitat, as a psycho-bio-socio-ethical self in a continuously changing society, within or without a family structure, will bear better fruit in clarifying the factors and co-factors at the basis of violence and in a search for means to combat its manifestations in the attempt, ultimately, to make our daily lives safer.

I divided the book into two main sections. The first section includes four chapters, each of which examines violence from a different perspective, i.e., historical, sociological, psychological, etho-biological, and statistical, even though statistics are necessarily reported throughout the book. Various theories regarding each argument are reviewed and critically appraised.

The second section of the book deals with the major manifestations of crime against the person in our society. I have dedicated a great deal of attention to these chapters because of my active involvement in community forensics and criminological psychiatry. I have included chapters on rape and domestic violence, both very timely subjects. I also discuss at length the anti-social personality disorder, and finally, in a chapter on serial killers I offer a brief historical analysis of this type of violent behavior. In particular, I describe the serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, whom I examined for many hours as a court-appointed psychiatric expert, and about whom I testified for many hours in Milwaukee Circuit Court.

My basic thesis, which runs throughout the book, is that the many variables so far amply studied, and unfortunately often poorly addressed by our society, are not the primary cause of violent behavior. Nonetheless, I have also written two chapters, one on illicit drug and alcohol abuse, and one on guns and other variables, or facilitators, as I prefer to call them, and their importance as co-factors in the genesis of crime.

Before concluding, I have attempted to reinforce my thesis by focusing my attention on the importance of the family in the formation of a person's good character as the only real prevention of crime and violence. I hope that this chapter, "At the Roots of Violence," will enlighten the reader about the ever-present importance of the family as a source of physical and moral support, a means by which values are passed on and virtues are acquired.

In concluding, I propose that the upsurge of violence in our society is not due primarily to the facilitators/variables which should continue to be addressed, especially the cancerous spread of illicit drug and alcohol use and abuse and the easy availability of guns, but is basically due to the lack of the formative influence of the family unit on its members, especially children

and adolescents. Violence in our homes and streets is at a high never before encountered, families are slowly disintegrating, people feel lost. Alexis de Toqueville would be surprised to see present-day America.

I do not offer any specific cure for this state of affairs because it is not within the scope of this book and would certainly involve another Herculean work. I can only say that my professional work and my experience tell me that if the social cell goes awry, the fabric of society tends to decay. Under such circumstances, violence, the outcome of many frustrations and dysfunctions, and a manifestation of almost genocidal proportions, ensues. That is what we are witnessing and this is what we must do: reintegrate the family at its best and help it to once again assume its role as the foundation for the good character of our citizens.

As a final note, I would like to alert the reader to my frequent use of a semantic approach to commonly used words. I feel that the etymological roots of words frequently give insight not only into their historical origins but also into their present day meaning.

NOTES

1. Zillmann, D. (1979). *Hostility and aggression*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Foreword by Ralph Slovenko</i> | vii |
| <i>Preface to Second Edition</i> | xi |
| <i>Preface to First Edition</i> | xiii |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xvii |

Part One—Studies on Violence

Chapter

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Violence: Past and Present | .5 |
| 2. The Biology of Violence | .19 |
| 3. The Psychology of Violence | .45 |
| 4. The Sociology of Violence | .70 |

Part Two—Manifestations of Violence

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 5. Antisocial Personality Disorder vs. Psychopathy: A Semantic Confusion? | .89 |
| 6. Psychopathy and Serial Killers | .107 |
| 7. Sexual Violence: Rapists, Child Molesters, Incest | .130 |
| 8. Domestic Violence | .157 |
| 9. Mass Murder: Adults and Adolescents | .178 |
| 10. Filicide and Parricide | .196 |

Part Three—Facilitators of Violence

| | |
|--------------------------------------------|------|
| 11. Facilitators of Violence: I | .225 |
| 12. Facilitators: II | .253 |
| 13. Television Violence and Children | .282 |

Part Four—Conclusion

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| 14. Crime Statistics | .291 |
| 15. At the Roots of Violence | .305 |
| <i>Epilogue</i> | .314 |
| <i>Index</i> | .323 |
| <i>Name Index</i> | .323 |
| <i>Subject Index</i> | .329 |

THE FACES OF VIOLENCE

Part One
STUDIES ON VIOLENCE

Chapter 1

VIOLENCE: PAST AND PRESENT

INTRODUCTION

The history of violence begins with humankind. Throughout the centuries and since time immemorial humans have been both prey and predator, endured hatred and aggression, enjoyed love and tenderness, and have been energized by courage and petrified by fear. In his trilogy, *Oresteia*, Aeschylus (450 B.C.E.) gives an incisive account of violence and the role that passions and vengeance play in interpersonal relationships. In *Agamemnon*, the first play of the trilogy, Clytemnestra, the unfaithful wife who has just killed her husband Agamemnon with the help of her lover, appears on stage and, says Aeschylus, “dark red stains were on her dress, her hands, her face, yet she herself looked unshaken, strongly sure of herself.” Clytemnestra says, “Here lies my husband dead, struck down justly by my hand. . . . He fell and as he gasped, his blood spouted and splashed me with dark spray, a dew of death, sweet to me as heaven’s sweet raindrops when the corn-land buds.”¹ The play is a story of violence, unfaithfulness, and lack of remorse. It portrays a violent murder, which the murderer justifies on the basis that her murdered husband had killed their child, Iphigenia. The trilogy is an early recounting

of filicide, uxoricide, and of an eventual matricide, since Orestes, the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, later kills his mother and her lover.

The above offers testimony to the ever-present violence among humans. In order to better understand the problem of human hostility and violence, therefore, one should look at humankind’s historical evolution. It is safe to assume that humans, viewed from an anthropological perspective, evolved as biological units who, in contact with their surroundings, reacted to the many sensorial stimuli present. For the sake of discussion, one can assume that these early humans were more spontaneous in their relationships and simplistic and realistic in their appreciation of the world around them and in their contacts with one another. They were close to nature and unsophisticated natural reactors, obviously still more impulsive and less defensive in a Freudian sense. One can argue that at that stage of evolution the social necessity of repression or suppression of emotions and feelings was not felt as it later came to be. Since emotion and feelings do not develop in a vacuum, it can be safely accepted that they became a part of the human psychological self as a responsive reaction to their contacts with nature and their fellow humans.