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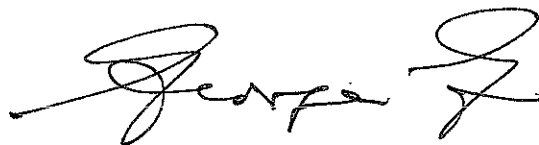
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VIOLENCE IN FRONTLINE

A report
by George Gerbner

How much violence is in the public affairs program FRONTLINE? Who is involved and why? How is it justified? How does it compare to violence on the commercial networks? These are some of the questions addressed in this analysis of all programs from FRONTLINE's 1993-94 season.

Briefly, more FRONTLINE programs contain violence than prime time dramatic programs aired on the major commercial networks, but FRONTLINE violence is briefer, less frequent per hour, involves fewer identifiable characters, and has a relatively high degree of justification. Most violence is shown as occurring outside the U.S. The demography of violence on FRONTLINE reflects, and in some cases extends, some stereotypic features of commercial programming.

The analysis

The analysis involved 25 hours (20 episodes) of tape-recorded programs made available to the Cultural Indicators research team at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. Cultural Indicators (CI) is an ongoing research project that monitors television and relates it to viewers' conceptions of reality.¹

Violence was defined as the act or threat of overt physical hurting or killing of a person or persons. The units of analysis were the violent scene (defined as violence among the same characters) and every person speaking or cited on camera. The observations were made, recorded, and stored in the CI database by trained analysts, following methods of coding and reliability described in reports listed in the Bibliography. Comparison figures were drawn from the CI database.

The 1993-94 season included 20 programs, 107 violent scenes, and 472 characters plus 14 news professionals. This report provides an account of the overall extent, amounts, and scenes of violence, the cast of characters and their involvement in violence, and the justifications offered for violence. Comparisons are made with available figures of commercial network dramatic programs aired in prime time. Of course, these programs are not strictly comparable to FRONTLINE and should be taken only as rough indications of the general commercial context in which many viewers watch FRONTLINE.

¹ The research began in 1967-68 with a study for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. It continued under the sponsorship of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, the National Institute of Mental Health, The White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, the American Medical Association, the Administration on Aging, the National Science Foundation, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, the Hose Bunka Foundation of Japan, the Screen Actors' Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the National Cable Television Association, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Ark Foundation, Inc., the Turner Broadcasting System, the Women's Initiative of the American Association of Retired Persons, the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives, and the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Public Health Service.

A summary of the findings follows. A Bibliography or related studies and all tabulations of data conclude the report.

How much violence?

Three-fourth (75 percent) of FRONTLINE programs contain violence. The proportion of commercial network programs containing violence is 71 percent. The average number of violent scenes per hour is 4.3, compared to more than 5 in commercial network programs, and nearly 8 in "reality shows." FRONTLINE violence is also of briefer duration. The overall average duration of a violent scene in FRONTLINE is 1.1 minutes per hour, compared to 1.5 minutes on the commercial networks in 1993.

Most of the violence comes from programs on Sarajevo, Haiti, South Africa, Tibet, Russia, and domestic programs on sports, industry, crime and mental illness. Every FRONTLINE program taking place in a foreign country contains violence. Even though only 35 percent of the programs have a foreign location, most of the violent scenes (87 percent) take place abroad. Foreign violence also occurs more frequently within the programs and lasts longer when it occurs than violence at home. In domestic locations, FRONTLINE programs show an average of 1.3 and in foreign locations 10.2 violent scenes per hour. Domestic scenes of violence average 0.8 minutes per hour, scenes of violence abroad average 1.6 minutes per hour. ("Reality show" violence on commercial networks stretches to 4.5 minutes per hour.)

The world according to FRONTLINE

Fourteen news professionals present, narrate, and interview on the FRONTLINE programs. They are all white; 13 are men and one is a woman. The gender and race gap is greater than on the commercial networks, where women comprise 35 percent and African-Americans 14 percent of news professionals.

Of the 472 characters presented on FRONTLINE, six out of ten are "participants" whose lives, practices and experiences are the subject of the episodes; 25 percent are "experts" who deliver authoritative opinions; and 15 percent are "bystanders" who witness events and are referred to, cited, or state a non-expert opinion.

The overall gender-gap of the FRONTLINE population is comparable to that of commercial television. Women are one in four persons; as "experts," their proportion goes down to one in five. Most persons of color are Haitians or Africans. Latino/Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans are greatly underrepresented at 2.8, 1.0 and 0.2 percent, respectively; this is comparable to that of the commercial networks. However, African-Americans are 7 percent, compared to 12 percent on the commercial networks.

The world of FRONTLINE is dominated by persons from government, business, and the media. "Participants" are mostly in government (27 percent or business (24 percent). "Experts" are either in media (30

percent) or government (24 percent). "Bystanders" whose occupations are known are most likely to be in government (25 percent), business (17 percent) and the media (15 percent).

Violence in the world of FRONTLINE

Group violence is prominent on FRONTLINE, with about one-third of the scenes involving masses of people. Identifiable individuals involved in violence either as perpetrators or as victims are 14 percent of all characters (16 percent of men and 9 percent of women), compared to at least twice as many in commercial network programs.

Most likely to become involved in violence are persons of color (24 percent), foreigners (24 percent), African-Americans (16 percent) and persons characterized as mentally ill (47 percent).

Most likely to be perpetrators of violence are foreign characters (11 percent), African-Americans (11 percent), and mentally ill characters (all 47 percent). Most likely to be victims are foreigners (19 percent), characters of color (18 percent) and those with physical disability or injury, often symptoms of their victimization.

A ratio between perpetrators and victims in any group indicates the "price" in victimization that the group pays for being violent. For example, for every 10 perpetrators of violence in FRONTLINE there are 16 victims. That is a higher ratio of relative victimization than in the commercial networks, where for every 10 perpetrators there are only 12 victims. In other words, FRONTLINE's characters pay a higher price in victimization for the violence they are shown to commit.

Those who are ill, injured, or disabled rarely commit violence but are five or six times more likely to be victims. In the general population, women pay the highest price: they suffer 24 victims for every 10 violent women. Next are persons of color (19 victims), and foreign characters (18 victims for every 10 perpetrators). The following is a tabulation of the number of victims for every 10 perpetrators of violence on FRONTLINE and on the commercial networks:

	FRONTLINE	Comm. Networks
Men	14	12
Women	24	15
Characters of color	19	13
Foreign characters	18	Not avail.

The "pecking order" of relative victimization ratios by gender shows that, aside from the ill or disabled, foreign, black and older men are at the bottom. For women, relative victimization is more frequent among young, white, and American females.

The lethal violence scenario shows that men, upscale characters, whites and foreigners are more likely to kill than to get killed, while women and blacks are as or more likely to get killed. Mentally

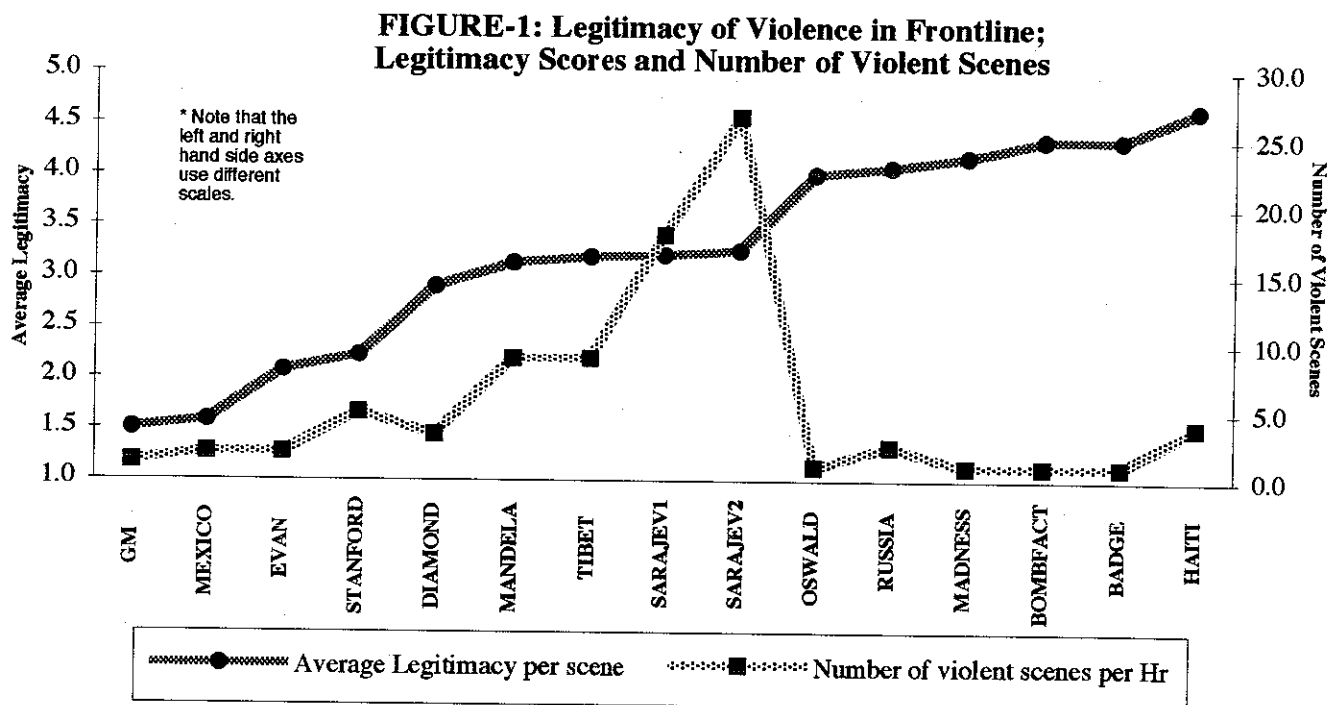
ill characters get involved in lethal violence only to kill; African-Americans only to get killed.

How "legitimate" is violence in FRONTLINE ?

Emphasis on six elements provide possible justifications for violent action. They are four types of consequences (physical, serious, long-lasting, and fatal), graphic detail, and the depiction of violence as clearly wrong and immoral.

Each violent scene was rated on each of the six items on a 5-point scale. A score of 1 indicated absence, a score of 5 high emphasis. A measure of reliability (Cronbach's alpha, 0.8) showed a high degree of consistency among the items.

An average score of legitimacy is the mean score of all violent scenes in the program. On the whole, programs that contained violence had an average score of legitimacy of 3.2. Domestic episodes had 3.1 and foreign episodes 3.4 average score of legitimacy. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the number of violent scenes per hour



and the average legitimacy scores. It shows that high violence episodes do not necessarily have high average legitimacy scores. (Note that the two measures do not use the same scale. Therefore, the lines are not comparable except for relative tendency of each.)

The programs are ranked according to legitimacy, from "GM" ("Heartbeat of America") which has little violence but even less or no apparent justification for it, to "Haiti" ("Showdown in Haiti") which has some violence and the highest degree of justification. Four

programs, including the two Sarajevo episodes, have the highest number of violent scenes but only average legitimacy scores.

While legitimation data from commercial networks are not yet complete, a preliminary review of information on the CI database shows that commercial network programs rarely emphasize the seriousness and long-range consequences of violence as much as FRONTLINE programs do.

Conclusions

An aggregate "bird's-eye-view" cannot go into the details, subtleties, interpretations and personal vision that are the stock-in-trade of reviewers, critics, and other analysts of individual programs. The strength of this analysis is its ability to reveal larger patterns, systems and policies implicit in programming.

On balance, FRONTLINE violence often follows conventional news and dramatic formulas, but also departs from them in significant ways. It goes abroad only when there is violence, or, at any rate, the events that seem to warrant foreign coverage are civil wars and turmoil, while the issues tackled at home are more diverse.

Justifications for the violence shown, such as the depiction of serious consequences, is on a relatively high level. The question that remains, however, is not only how much violence is depicted and how well it is justified. Media violence is a selective scenario of social relationships. Editorial judgment guides the selection and social typing of such a scenario, and determines the point beyond which violence, no matter how justified, becomes overkill.

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TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF VIOLENCE IN FRONTLINE EPISODES AND
ON COMMERCIAL NETWORK PRIME TIME DRAMATIC PROGRAMS

	FRONTLINE			NETWORKS		
	Domestic	Foreign	All Episodes	20 Year Network*	Fall '93 Network**	Drama Reality
Number of programs	13	7	20	1,306	84	37
Proportion of programs containing violence	62%	100%	75%	71.2%	67.9%	62.2%
Average number of violent scenes per program	1.5	12.4	5.4	4.8	4.2	1.2
Average number of violent scenes per hour	1.2	10.2	4.3	5.3	5.8	7.7
Average duration of violence, minutes per hour	0.8	1.6	1.1	2.2	1.5	4.5

* ABC, CBS, and NBC networks, prime time programs during 1973-93.

** ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX networks, prime time programs in Fall '93.

EPISODES WITH "DOMESTIC" SUBJECT:

Heartbeat of America (GM)
Prisoners of Silence (Autism)
Who was Lee Harvey Oswald?
Aids, Blood and Politics
Place for Madness
Diamond Empire
Tabloid Truth: Michael Jackson Story
In the Game (Stanford W Basketball)
Kevorkian File
Public Lands, Private Profits
Go Back to Mexico
Secrets of a Bomb Factory
Behind the Badge

EPISODES WITH "FOREIGN" SUBJECT:

Showdown in Haiti
Red Flag Over Tibet
Sarajevo: Living and the Dead
Mandela
Struggle for Russia
Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo
Trouble with Evan (child abuse,
Canada)

TABLE 2: VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION IN FRONTLINE

	N	Involved in viol. %	As Perp. %	As Vict. %	As both %	For every 10 Perpetrators no.of victims
TOTAL	472	14.4	7.0	11.0	3.6	16
Gender						
Male	342	16.4	8.2	11.7	3.5	14
Female	128	9.4	3.9	9.4	3.9	24
Age						
Below 60	364	15.1	7.7	11.3	3.8	15
60 and over	43	7.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	Victims only
Social Class						
Upper class	45	11.1	8.9	8.9	6.7	10
Middle class	388	15.2	7.2	11.6	3.6	16
"Lower class"	32	6.3	3.1	3.1	0.0	10
Race						
All White chars.	357	12.6	6.7	9.8	3.9	15
Chars. of color	97	23.7	9.3	17.5	3.1	19
Nationality						
U.S.	292	8.6	4.8	6.2	2.4	13
Foreign	176	24.4	10.8	19.3	5.7	18
American Characters						
White American	244	9.0	4.9	6.6	2.5	13
Afric.-Americ.	19	15.8	10.5	10.5	5.3	10
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	8	62.5	12.5	62.5	12.5	50
Mental disability	21	23.8	23.8	9.5	9.5	4
Physical illness	16	37.5	6.3	37.5	6.3	60
Mental illness	17	47.1	47.1	23.5	23.5	5

TABLE 3: VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION BY GENDER: MEN

	N	Involved in viol. %	As Perp. %	As Vict. %	As both %	For every 100 Perpetrators no. of victims
MEN	342	16.4	8.2	11.7	3.5	14
Age						
Below 60	256	17.6	9.4	12.1	3.9	13
60 and over	36	8.3	0.0	8.3	0.0	Victims only
Social Class						
Upper class	34	11.8	8.8	8.8	5.9	10
Middle class	281	17.4	8.5	12.5	3.6	15
"Lower class"	22	9.1	4.5	4.5	0.0	10
Race						
All White chars.	252	14.3	8.3	10.3	4.4	12
Chars. of color	76	26.3	9.2	18.4	1.3	20
Nationality						
U.S.	200	9.0	6.0	5.5	2.5	9
Foreign	139	27.3	11.5	20.9	5.0	18
American Characters						
White American	168	10.1	6.5	6.5	3.0	10
Afric.-Americ.	11	9.1	9.1	0.0	0.0	No victims
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	4	75.0	0.0	75.0	0.0	Victims only
Mental disability	16	31.3	31.3	12.5	12.5	4
Physical illness	10	40.0	10.0	40.0	10.0	40
Mental illness	14	42.9	42.9	14.3	14.3	3

TABLE 4: VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION BY GENDER: WOMEN

	N	Involved in viol. %	As Perp. %	As Vict. %	As both %	For every 100 Perpetrators no. of victims
WOMEN	128	9.4	3.9	9.4	3.9	24
Age						
Below 60	107	9.3	3.7	9.3	3.7	25
60 and over	7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Social Class						
Upper class	11	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1	10
Middle class	105	9.5	3.8	9.5	3.8	25
"Lower class"	10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Race						
All White chars.	105	8.6	2.9	8.6	2.9	30
Chars. of color	21	14.3	9.5	14.3	9.5	15
Nationality						
U.S.	90	7.8	2.2	7.8	2.2	35
Foreign	37	13.5	8.1	13.5	8.1	17
American Characters						
White American	76	6.6	1.3	6.6	1.3	50
Afric.-Americ.	8	25.0	12.5	25.0	12.5	20
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	4	50.0	25.0	50.0	25.0	20
Mental disability	5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Physical illness	4	50.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	Victims only
Mental illness	3	66.7	66.7	66.7	33.3	10

TABLE 5: RANKING OF VIOLENT/VICTIM RATIOS IN FRONTLINE

MALES		For every 100 perpetrators	FEMALES	For every 10 perpetrators
	N	no. of vict.		N no. of vict.
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	6	None inv.	60 and over	7 None inv.
Asian/Pacific Amer	1	None inv.	"Lower class"	10 None inv.
Native American	1	None inv.	Hisp./Lat. Americ.	3 None inv.
Afric.-Americ.	11	No vict.	Asian/Pacific Amer.	2 None inv.
Mental illness	14	3	Native American	0 None inv.
Mental disability	16	4	Mental disability	5 None inv.
U.S.	200	9	Upper class	11 10
Upper class	34	10	Mental illness	3 10
"Lower class"	22	10	Chars. of color	21 15
White American	168	10	Foreign	37 17
All White chars.	252	12	Afric.-Americ.	8 20
Below 60	256	13	Physical disability	4 20
ALL MEN	342	14	ALL WOMEN	128 24
Middle class	281	15	Below 60	107 25
Foreign	139	18	Middle class	105 25
Chars. of color	76	20	All White chars.	105 30
Physical illness	10	40	U.S.	90 35
60 and over	36	Vict. only	White American	76 50
Physical disability	4	Vict. only	Physical illness	4 Vict. only

TABLE 6: KILLERS AND KILLED IN FRONTLINE

	N	Involved in kill. %	As Killer %	As Killed %	As both %	For every 10 Killers no.killed
TOTAL	472	4.7	2.5	2.3	0.2	9
Gender						
Male	342	5.0	2.9	2.3	0.3	8
Female	128	3.9	1.6	2.3	0.0	15
Age						
Below 60	364	4.7	2.5	2.5	0.3	10
60 and over	43	2.3	0.0	2.3	0.0	Killed only
Social Class						
Upper class	45	4.4	4.4	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Middle class	388	4.9	2.6	2.6	0.3	10
"Lower class"	32	3.1	0.0	3.1	0.0	Killed only
Race						
All White chars.	357	4.5	2.5	2.2	0.3	9
Chars. of color	97	6.2	3.1	3.1	0.0	10
Nationality						
U.S.	292	3.8	1.7	2.4	0.3	14
Foreign	176	6.3	4.0	2.3	0.0	6
American Characters						
White American	244	4.1	2.0	2.5	0.4	12
Afric.-Americ.	19	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	Killed only
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	8	37.5	12.5	25.0	0.0	20
Mental disability	21	4.8	4.8	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Physical illness	16	18.8	0.0	18.8	0.0	Killed only
Mental illness	17	17.6	17.6	0.0	0.0	Killers only

TABLE 7: KILLERS AND KILLED BY GENDER: MEN

	N	Involved in kill. %	As Killer %	As Killed %	As both %	For every 10 Killers no.killed
MEN	342	5.0	2.9	2.3	0.3	8
Age						
Below 60	256	5.1	3.1	2.3	0.4	8
60 and over	36	2.8	0.0	2.8	0.0	Killed only
Social Class						
Upper class	34	2.9	2.9	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Middle class	281	5.3	3.2	2.5	0.4	8
"Lower class"	22	4.5	0.0	4.5	0.0	Killed only
Race						
All White chars.	252	5.2	3.2	2.4	0.4	8
Chars. of color	76	5.3	2.6	2.6	0.0	10
Nationality						
U.S.	200	4.5	2.5	2.5	0.5	10
Foreign	139	5.8	3.6	2.2	0.0	6
American Characters						
White American	168	5.4	3.0	3.0	0.6	10
Afric.-Americ.	11	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	4	50.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	Killed only
Mental disability	16	6.3	6.3	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Physical illness	10	20.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	Killed only
Mental illness	14	14.3	7.1	0.0	0.0	Killers only

TABLE 8: KILLERS AND KILLED BY GENDER: WOMEN

	N	Involved in kill. %	As Killer %	As Killed %	As both %	For every 10 Killers No. killed
WOMEN	128	3.9	1.6	2.3	0.0	15
Age						
Below 60	107	3.7	0.9	2.8	0.0	30
60 and over	7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Social Class						
Upper class	11	9.1	9.1	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Middle class	105	3.8	1.0	2.9	0.0	30
"Lower class"	10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Race						
All White chars.	105	2.9	1.0	1.9	0.0	20
Chars. of color	21	9.5	4.8	4.8	0.0	10
Nationality						
U.S.	90	2.2	0.0	2.2	0.0	Killed only
Foreign	37	8.1	5.4	2.7	0.0	5
American Characters						
White American	76	1.3	0.0	1.3	0.0	Killed only
Afric.-Americ.	8	12.5	0.0	12.5	0.0	Killed only
Hisp./Lat. Americ.	3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Asian/Pacific Amer.	2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Native American	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Disability & Illness						
Physical disability	4	25.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	Killers only
Mental disability	5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	None involved
Physical illness	4	25.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	Killed only
Mental illness	3	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0	Killers only

TABLE 9: RANKING OF KILLER/KILLED RATIOS IN FRONTLINE

MALES			FEMALES		
	N	For every 10 killers no.killed		N	For every 10 Killers no.killed
Mental disab.	16	Killers	Upper class	11	Killers
Mental illness	14	Killers	Physical disab.	4	Killers
Upper class	34	Killers	Mental illness	3	Killers
Afric.-Americ.	11	None inv.	60 and over	7	None inv.
Hisp./Lat.Am.	6	None inv.	"Lower class"	10	None inv.
Asian/Pacif.Am.	1	None inv.	Hisp./Lat.Amer.	3	None inv.
Native American	1	None inv.	Asian/Pacif.Am.	2	None inv.
Foreign	139	6	Native American	0	None inv.
Below 60	256	8	Mental disab.	5	None inv.
All White chars.	252	8	Foreign	37	5
Middle class	281	8	Chars. of color	21	10
ALL MEN	342	8	ALL WOMEN	128	15
Chars. of color	76	10	All Whites	105	20
U.S.	200	10	Below 60	107	30
White American	168	10	Middle class	105	30
60 and over	36	Killed	U.S.	90	Killed
"Lower class"	22	Killed	White American	76	Killed
Physical disab.	4	Killed	Afric.-Americ.	8	Killed
Physical illness	10	Killed	Physical illness	4	Killed