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Profiting from Misery

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**Winners of the Student Essay
Contest on Ethics**

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PROFITING FROM MISERY

1st Place

Mark Davino

As a whole, the American public has a taste for gore. We've almost all spent money to see "Jason" or "Freddy" hack up unsuspecting teenagers, and at times we'd laugh at how gruesome some of the murders were; it's a dark part of our culture. Deep down we know that all the carnage we see is the work of make up and special effects, compliments of Hollywood. Imagine, however, if the death and bloodshed were real. Would you pay \$7 dollars to see real people and animals die on the big screen? It may sound gruesome, but all over the Chicagoland area on the weekend of March 4, lines of people formed outside "certain selected" theaters at 12 a.m. to view this morbid spectacle. Although I don't feel that it's morally correct to willingly view a movie like that, I think the bigger question is whether it's right for someone to make a profit off the misery of others.

The movie in question is *Faces of Death, Part 4*, two hours of tragic accidents and Satanic rituals caught on film. The *Faces of Death* series have been around for years, but until recently they were kept in the back of ma & pa video stores, where they belonged. That all changed a few weeks ago when I started my spring break to a blood curdling scream and some hyperactive radio announcer saying, "... Ten times more horrible than anything you've ever seen in your life, so sickening that anybody who could sit through the whole movie gets a certificate saying that they survived. This week only at midnight and only at selected theaters, *Faces of Death, Part 4*... could you look death straight in the eye?" It made me sick! If I didn't know what *Faces of Death* already was, I would have thought that he was talking about a monster truck show! How could any person get so excited about death? If that wasn't bad enough, I started wondering how the families of the victims in the movie felt about people getting a certificate for watching their loss. But, heck, somewhere someone was earning a chunk of \$7 dollars for every person that attended their demented film.

Showing *Faces of Death* at night in theaters that show *Bambi* during the day is just another example of someone's profit coming out of someone else's pain, an age old American idea. After almost any catastrophe, especially a foreign catastrophe, you can be sure that at least one American entrepreneur will print a T-shirt or a bumper sticker while the people affected are still homeless and hungry. Apparently even the AIDS crisis wasn't too tragic for some "genius" to come up with a shirt that said, "AIDS... kills fags dead". Even the major television networks are trying to get in on this "profit from pain" idea. More than one network has shown interest in televising an electric chair execution. Maybe one day we might be able to come home from

school or work, pop a bag of microwave popcorn, turn on a television and watch our favorite serial killer get barbecued as we read the back of his trading card (by the way, serial killer trading cards already exist and at the rate things are going, one day they will be next to the chewing gum and baseball cards at the local store). Is it just me, or is there something really disturbing about all this?

Every dark cloud (pitch black in this case) supposedly has a silver lining. The silver lining here is that the people who come up with these ideas are making a better life for themselves and their families. These "profit from pain" ideas actually help some people live the American dream. Other bright spots are that it helps to create jobs: manpower is needed to print shirts and bumper stickers, not to mention all the usher positions that opened up for the midnight showings. I guess that when somebody suffers, somebody else lives better.

If my silver lining sounded weak, that's because it was. I see no reason why our society should put a quick buck over human life in a time when human life is becoming less and less valued (just watch the news to see what I mean). There will always be get-rich-quick schemes and there will always be suffering, but there should never be a connection between the two, especially in a "civilized" society. We're all entitled to our own opinions; this is a free society. But if you don't agree with me, just imagine how you'd feel if you lost a loved one in an accident or disaster and someone cashed a check paid for by your loss.