

Storefront Lawyers oldtime melodrama

A lawyer helps an old man get off the hook, helps the old man's daughter by nailing the slumlord who is the object of her rent strike, advises the rent strikers, and all the old man has to do is promise to go straight and listen to a lecture by the judge saying what a fine young man the lawyer is: "Storefront Lawyers." Tune in next week as the three young lawyers (financed in their community-based storefront operation by the benevolent graces of a Los Angeles law firm) battle for the rights of a militant Black welfare mother, free of charge.

Of course, the legal aid of the "Storefront Lawyers" is not free, any more than television is free — but the illusion of both as freebies persists. The viewers are the real clients of the new show's heroes, not the ethnic extras who get their life's problems solved in sixty minutes every Wednesday — and the price is high.

Teevee melodrama has always included a Moral. These days the Moral is no longer the mythologically simple one of superheroes and mysterious riders of the plains, with good guys and bad guys and frontier virtues — it's a more sophisticated and insidious Immoral that reduces any context to a Hollywood studio, dealing with contemporary society as a means to perpetuate not a culture (as the socialization processes in schools and churches used to perform) but rather the non-culture of the dominant economic, political and class interests within that society.

Television can not be characterized as communications medium — rather, it should be characterized as a communications industry: the corporation is the medium. It is a particularly powerful medium because it not only sells products but, through its entertainment creates a buying environment and sets of buying values that result in the growth of its propaganditic nature. The propaganda is not the "liberal" propaganda denounced by Spiro (for they are part of the same conspiracy he is), it is the propaganda of the kind Spiro and the liberals endorse — in shows ranging from the "Storefront Lawyers" to the "FBI" — where the show explicitly is geared to instill faith in the perfectibility of the system.

"Storefront Lawyers" identifies symptoms of social problems, but uses only a veneer of relevance to channel life-energies in the direction of the tube. The increase of "relevance" in television prime-time programming is noteworthy because it indicates the networks' recognition of the need for strong positive media in a time of deterioration and revolution, and the need to try and co-opt a growing political consciousness of the average viewer by relevant program packaging.

The show is basically, despite the veneer, content-less, and is a terribly alienating experience, filtering things like rent strikes and protests and pollution and welfare through a Hollywood lens. The show's non-plot had nothing to do with social problems; they merely

provide a convenient and contemporary set of stereotypes and a framework for the melodrama and a vehicle for the Immoralistic punch-line at the end. The main purpose of the show, from last week's viewing, is to sell cellophane tape, automobiles, hair tonic, toothpaste, eye makeup and a belief in the system which produces these wonder goods.

In terms of structure and format, such television melodrama has not changed in twenty years. That fact is a clue to the realization that its function has likewise not changed too much — it's merely in different packaging. The show's melodramatic situation is only a slight variation on Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Gabby Hayes, or Clark Kent and Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen, or Perry Mason and Della Street and Paul Drake — or, more recently, our pals Linc, Julie and Pete of the Mod Squad.

Disregarding the titillating (as well as unexpressed) sexual tensions of such triangles, notice the consistency with The Law. How many prime-time teevee shows star police? Half? How many are about rich, earnest young teachers, lawyers and journalists? What

are they trying to tell us? What are they trying to sell us?

OLD MAN (to young lawyer): (after swindling a slumlord) "He stepped on my people and I hit him where it hurts!"

JUDGE (to Old Man): (at the end of the show, after the young lawyer has saved him with wit and wizardry) "You are leaving this courtroom not

because of yourself, but because an extremely competent lawyer, without fear and without profit motive, handled your case. I remember the days when I was young... but times have changed. This country's problems are too big and too many now and we don't have time for the likes of you anymore..."

Geography dept. has publication

The Geography Department has published a booklet of course description for all geography courses to be offered during second semester. The booklet includes statements by

the instructors on course requirements, formats, and general information.

Copies of the booklet are available in the Geography Department, 204 Burnett Hall.

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