

# 'Trial of Billy Jack' overglorified, disappointing

Why the sequel to "Billy Jack" took so long to be released, especially since there was an obvious chance to cash-in on (or exploit) that middle-American movie phenomena, was a bit puzzling. The producers, writers and directors of that movie were the film's stars, Tom Laughlin (Billy) and Delores Taylor (Jean, the pacifist founder of the Arizona Freedom School). They had said the movie was on the way, but it took over three years for it to show up. Now we know why.

"The Trial of Billy Jack", an elaborate three hour production, calls itself an epic, but is much too padded, lasting about an hour longer than it needed to.

The movie is surprisingly up to date, almost as if it had waited for the Watergate affair and Nixon's resignation to get over with.

Nearly five years have passed since the events at the end of "Billy Jack", until the opening of this movie. In flashbacks we learn of the trial and sentencing of Billy and the incredible growth of the Freedom School (they even start their own muckraking TV station) that had taken place under Jean's guidance.

### Melodramatic confrontations

But once all this is out of the way, Taylor and Laughlin swing us back into an expanded rehash of the melodramatic confrontations found in the earlier film. It's Billy vs. Jean in the same old violence vs. anti-violence arguments, determined students vs. hippie-hating townspeople, impoverished Indians vs. greedy landgrabbers and, of course, Billy Jack kicking his way through hordes of brutal cops and redneck cowboys.

"The Trial of Billy Jack" is really only a glorified B-picture, yet is one of the most powerfully gripping and discomfoting pieces of political movie propaganda to be produced in America in years. The emotional pitch transcends anything experienced in "Billy Jack", and the last half hour of the film is a maddening tear-festival, both on the screen

and quite often in the audience.

The local townspeople are apathetic and misunderstanding, the cowboys are swaggeringly obnoxious and still say "nigger" and the local banker is a money grabbing capitalist.

### Propaganda countered

The important thing is that Taylor and Laughlin know lines like this are disgusting, and that's why they're there. I've never wanted to stand up and throw something at a movie screen before, but I did then, not only because of what was happening on the screen but because of the discomfoting knowledge that a movie could manipulate me that much.

greg lukow  
key grip

The propaganda is often countered (disguised is a better word) by a host of offsetting characters. There are likeable townspeople as well as bad ones, sympathetic police and guardsmen as well as those that follow their orders blindly; corrupt Indians along with the persecuted ones, and in contrast to the peace students, there are some inclined toward terrorism as a means of retaliation. But the overriding sentiment is not watered down and the motives are always apparent.

Where "Billy Jack" left us with a saddened but hopeful outlook, "The Trial" gives a bleak attitude of pessimism and leaves us with a question mark for the future. It is too strong for its own good and its biggest fault is that it fails as basic entertainment.

### Barefoot retribution

After five hours and two movies (three if you count the earlier "Born Losers") of seeing reprehensible, bigoted baddies humiliating the kids at the Freedom School, it

would have been nice to have them, just once, crushed into oblivion. It's the barefoot retribution of Billy, as he calmly peels off his boots and socks and whirls into his karate act, that does the most. But, by the end of the movie, the situation is so big that even he can do nothing. The film is disappointing because instead of continuing as a new breed of hero, Billy is just an observer on a higher plane of battle.

There are other faults to be sure. Taylor doesn't really act, she snuffles and it soon becomes overbearing. She wouldn't seem natural without her watery red eyes. The love interest between her and Billy is never approached let alone resolved and their characterization lacks because of it.

"The Trial of Billy Jack" is both timely and a throwback to the turmoil of the late 60s.

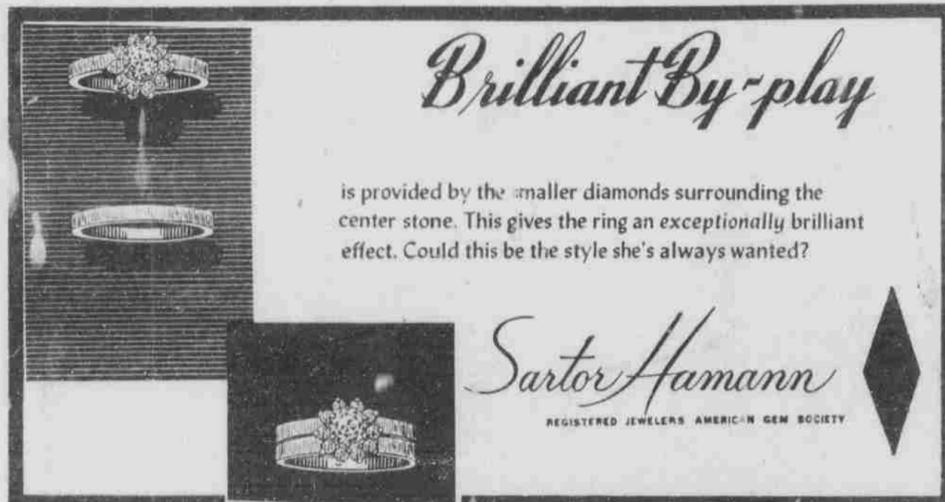
### Important film

In a flashback, Billy recalls his war experiences when a group of American soldiers herded together a large group of Vietnamese civilians into a ditch and wasted them. It's a stunning unparalleled scene in the American movie conscience, the type of thing previously reserved only for the Nazis in World War II films.

The movie hopes to and could, if people pay any attention to it, shake up American complacency just a bit. It challenges the current belief that America is in a new state of openness and honesty. Instead it says we are in a period of numbness and withdrawal where people are all too easily inclined to forget.

Taylor and Laughlin have, in a way, taken advantage of us, leading us to expect another emotional entertaining melodrama and instead hits us with this. The movie may offend some (and it knows it), but there is too much behind it to pass it off as lightly as we might have expected to do.

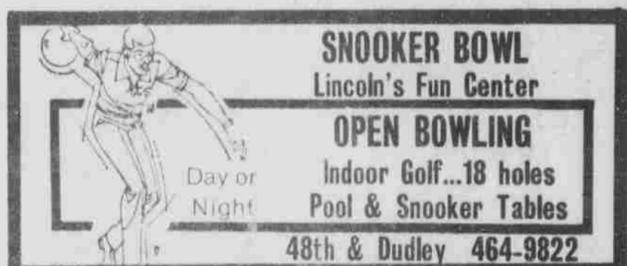
An often mediocre and embarrassingly self-indulgent movie, "The Trial of Billy Jack" may be, in spite of itself, one of the most important films of the year.



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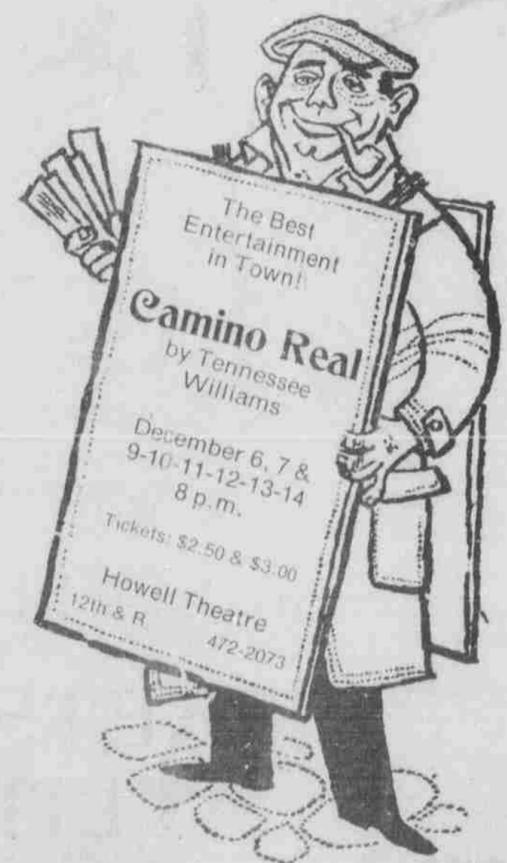
**Quick Quiz No. 2**

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

Army ROTC takes up a lot of time I could use for something else. It is a big committment.

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FALSE: Military Science 111 meets for one hour of class and one hour of lab each week. If you like the extracurricular activities such as Scarlet Berets, Rifle Team, Pershing Rifles Drill Team, etc., that's up to you. They are voluntary. Freshmen can begin ROTC next spring. Visit us.



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