

Current Attitudes Encourage Theft

A STUDY of shoplifting reported in Nation's Business magazine concludes that it may be reduced by educating employees in how to deal with it and encouraging customers to report it.

Previously, observations had been made that less than a third of the people who observed another customer stealing would report it. In later experiments, it was found that the proportion usually could be increased by posting signs:

"Report shoplifters! They are costing you money."

This might be classified as economic persuasion, and it probably will help. However, if we really expect to stop the stealing, burglarizing and robbing that is going on, education will have to reach much deeper into people's character.

Stealing is immoral, unfair and it is against the law. One of the Ten Commandments says: "Thou shalt not steal." Theft is prohibited in nearly every society. It has been punished by death or maiming in a few places.

A sizable segment of the population of the United States either does not know this or disagrees with the principle of honesty. Stealing, in many forms, is on the increase.

The notorious looting that occurred in New York City in July reflected both immorality and amorality.

Poverty was given as a justification. A director of the National Urban League said: "In a crisis, the underclass feels no compulsion to abide by the rules of the game because they find that the normal rules do not apply to them."

A woman said: "Jealousy can make me hate you and take what you have." Another rationalized: "Everybody steals. Politicians steal. What's the use to bust my tail from 9 to 5 for \$100 a week?" Law and right didn't bother them.

A man blamed welfare. "If you keep giving people stuff, that's why they loot when the lights go out," he said. "Working is out of their minds. They think everything must

be taken." Might becomes the power of right.

Also in the stealing picture are businessmen and employees who misappropriate money and property. Manufacturers and merchants have been known to give short weights and measures.

Employees also have been found guilty of stealing merchandise. Repairmen have been accused of making repairs not needed or charging for parts not installed.

Transportation companies maintain rigid security to keep their workers from stealing shipments. A Texas preacher recently stole \$75,000 worth of rare books and manuscripts.

Private property is a symbol of freedom and unless it is secure, one may question whether the people really are free.

Current attitudes that ridicule traditional ways of life often encourage infringement on rights of others. They respect neither property ownership nor personal privileges.