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Why Television Turns Viewers Away

ABOUT 4 o'clock on Saturday afternoon, after a day of reading, writing and chores, I decided to see if I could find some entertainment on TV, which claims to offer a lot of it.

Luck was with me. An unlisted movie about newspaperman Henry M. Stanley searching Africa for missionary David Livingston in the 1870s was running on KOET. It starred Spencer Tracy and Walter Brennan when they were young. It was a great movie.

Usually we aren't that fortunate. Generally, if the program synopsis do not turn us away the background music and "who-done-it" listings will. Even westerns made in recent years often do not have a "hero" or even a single respectable character.

Because they are produced mainly by the same sorts of people, films for movies and TV are in the same kind of decay.

Take these paragraphs from recent movie reviews published in this newspaper and try to find wholesomeness, entertainment, inspira-

tion, or other redeeming qualities:

One said: "This film deals sensitively with the problems of teen-age embalmers whose mothers have committed suicide and whose fathers hold seances with strange women in the casket warehouse."

Another said: "There's no one here to like. Familiar actor Cliff DeYoung plays a stridently insensitive coach. Tracey's parents are disgustingly naive and solicitous. Rourke's father stumbles through the film in a stupor — like most of the players. He, at least, has the excuse of being a sot."

It's no wonder that so many of today's youngsters are devoid of courtesy when they learn their etiquette from watching beer commercials and family brawls in TV "situation comedies."

A survey by the Television Bureau of Advertising says that in 1983 households with TV sets watched an average of 7 hours and 2 minutes a day, which was 14 minutes more than in 1982. Perhaps they were searching through a dozen channels

looking for something.

An analysis in U.S. News & World Report headlined, "Why People Are Turned Off by Television," (Feb. 13, 1984) shows a decline in the proportion of viewers watching three major networks. "The public is deserting traditional kinds of programs that long have been television's staples," it is observed.

One reason could be decline in quality of the staples. Like the movie theaters, they are appealing to prurient interests of teen-agers and "adolescent adults" with sex, violence and immorality. There are good programs on TV but not nearly enough.

Regardless of how repulsive a movie or TV program may be some people will watch. There are many other people who are choosy about how they spend (or invest) their time and who turn to other things when the trash comes on.

Someone once said, "There's no way to underestimate the poor taste of the American public," but movies and TV are trying.