

## LETTERS

### *Look at Japan*

Neal B. Freeman's review of *Watching America* by S. Robert Lichter, et al. ["The Wasteland," Oct. 7] emphasizes the book's findings about the peculiar social messages conveyed by prime-time television: 89 per cent of the time businessmen are corrupt, government officials are obstructionist, sex is interesting only outside marriage, and minorities do no evil. Mr. Freeman concludes by wondering to what extent these messages get through to the American public and gently berates the authors for not answering this question.

May I hazard a speculation based on the Japanese example? Board a commuter train in Tokyo and you'll notice arch-respectable businessmen reading telephone-book-sized comic books filled with the raunchiest and most violent sexual exploits. And Japanese television so wallows in imbecility, it makes American programming look mighty good.

Yet all this mayhem on page and screen has little social effect in Japan; individuals remain highly repressed, society is well ordered, crime rates stay low. The reason? The Japanese reader and viewer do not confuse diurnal reality with their fantasy lives of corruption, violence, and sex. On the contrary, the latter seem to serve as a diversion which makes the maintenance of rigid personal control easier to accomplish.

Perhaps the same is true in the United States, and the fantasy world of popular culture is innocuous, if not charming. The high incidence of crime has nothing to do with television; the profusion of murders on television may serve as a release rather than a stimulant. (For adults; children are another matter.)

Perhaps we can all lighten up a bit and stop worrying about the contents of television drama. At the same time, we should look for the sources of crime elsewhere—such as the uncivilized streets.

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