A reminder: the March 10th program has been put back a week to March 17th. A new schedule, covering us up to the Summer, and making a couple of other minor changes, will be mailed this coming weekend. If you think (or know) that your current stock of stamped envelopes is exhausted, please mail a couple more in by the weekend.

March 17th program: TRAFFIC IN SOULS (1913), George Leane Tucker’s remarkable white slavery expose; near documentary, possibly the most sophisticated feature film to that time, and deserving of far more attention than it got in its one showing at the MFA; and CAPTAIN FLY BY NIGHT (1922), a fine toned print of a lively little "Zorro"-type adventure, with Johnny Walker, directed by William K. Howard.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

February 21, 1975

Two early sound juvenile delinquency dramas

While in the post-Dead End Kids years of the late thirties, forties and fifties, the juvenile delinquency story became common-place as much of a standardized commodity as the Western and the Mystery - in the very early 30's it was less frequently encountered. (Not least of the reasons being, of course, that juvenile delinquency itself was a less common-place problem then.) The youth-problem film then veered more to such depression-oriented films as "Wild Boys of the Road", or to the "Children of Divorce" type of film. Tonight's two films, both from the same period and the same studio - and with some overlapping in story cast members - complement each other rather well. While the basic story material in each is now familiar stuff, it wasn't cliches then, and the freshness still shines through - as does the unforced emotion and honest sentiment.

THE AGE OF CONSENT (Rko Radio, 1932) Directed by Gregory La Cava; Executive Producer, David O. Selznick; Associate Producer, Pandro S. Berman; Screenplay by Sarah Y. Martin and Francis Cockrell from the play "Cross Roads" by Martin Flavin; Camera, Roy Hunt; 6 reels
With Dorothy Wilson, Richard Cromwell, Eric Linden, Arline Judge, John Halliday, Aline Pringle, Reginald Barlow.

Admittedly the lesser of the two films, "The Age of Consent" is still a mature and surprising film. For every predictable situation and too-good-to-be-true character - such as John H. alliday's professor - there are sequences that don't pull well before the picture, such as the climax, and a scene in which the good actor, Arline Judge again shows what a really good little actress she could be at a time, and it was a pleasure - much too rare a pleasure unfortunately - to see the lovely and graceful Dorothy Wilson, who never became the star that she should have been.

ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN? (Rko Radio 1931). Written and directed by Wesley Ruggles; Scenario: Howard Estabrook; Camera, Leo Tover; Music, Max Steiner; 8 reels
With Eric Linden, Rochelle Hudson, Arline Judge, Ben Alexander, Beryl Mercer, Robert Quirk, William Ordean, Harry Sabin, Balf Harcalde, Roberta Gale, Mary Kemman, Billy Batts.

It may sound like limited praise to refer to "Are These Our Children?" as Wesley Ruggles' best picture. Normally a rather stodgy and heavy-handed director, he shared with Frank Lloyd the distinction of having made a number of very profitable films whose box office success was calculated by the casual, and many of which could probably have been turned into a much better picture by another director. But "Are These Our Children?", which he wrote as well as directed, is clearly a project that excited him, and that he felt was important; it is an intensely personal film in the same way that William K. Howard's not dis-similar "Backdoor to Heaven" was personal. Moreover, in purely grammatical terms - the use of the moving camera, careful compositions, well-placed and very stylized transitional montage, scenes and effects - it is much more of a movie than most of Ruggles' other films. It is also quite possibly the first genuine talkie film noir. Even though that phrase came into usage quite late, and the "rules" of film noir retroactively and arbitrarily laid down, it does seem to "follow" all those rules even though preceding the genre by a decade. At times near documentary, at others with the casual realism of Warner Brothers, it is a moderately paced yet somehow always very honest film. Eric Linden's performance, especially in the closing scenes, is quite remarkably sensitive, and never before since has he had such a chance - nor done so well with such a sensitive dramatic role as this final one, which has more than a casual relationship to the climax of "An American Tragedy". In the face of the film's many virtues, its flaws are minor ones. Already quite a long film, it suggests that it may have been longer, and edited severely before release. Linden's initial descent into crime is just too quick and inadequately motivated, and one or two transitions later seem a bit abrupt too. Beryl Mercer's type-casting - in songy - is tiresome, though probably much less so in 1931 when audiences hadn't had to sit through a whole decade of it! On the whole, a major film of its day, and one that should be far better known than it is.

William K. Everson