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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | [Michael Asimow](http://docs.google.com/bios.htm#asimow)     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Official site](http://www.cbs.com/primetime/queens_supreme/)  [Christine Corcos](http://docs.google.com/queens_corcos.htm)  [Libby A. White](http://docs.google.com/queens_white.htm) |   One thing I liked about the show is that it highlighted some real issues about juries. It was very good in underlining how wretchedly unpleasant it can be for jurors to be cooped up in jury rooms wrangling for days with obnoxious people they can't stand and who seem to be completely irrational. The episode raises serious questions about whether our commitment to juries in civil cases makes any sense. | |  | | --- | | ***QUEENS SUPREME*--WHO CARES ABOUT JUDGES?**  By Michael Asimow  Let's face it. The life of judges is really boring. Trial judges just sit up there on the bench, hammer their gavel, rule on motions, sustain or overrule evidentiary objections, instruct the jury, and go to lunch. They are almost completely passive, not active like the lawyers. By comparison, the life of appellate judges is even more boring. They spend their day reading briefs, listening to oral argument, and writing opinions. As a result, a TV series based on the life of trial or appellate judges is likely to be a real snoozer.  The fate of the two Supreme Court series that debuted last year (*First Monday* and *The Court*) was a bad omen. They were killed after a few episodes. The writers tried to liven them up with sex among the clerks and bickering among the justices, but it just didn't work. On the other hand, *Judging Amy* has been a modest success. The shows do a decent job of exploring real issues in juvenile and family law. People seem interested in the life of judge Amy Gray (and her children, ex-husband, boyfriends and her gay court clerk). In my opinion, the key to the show's success is Amy's mother Maxine Gray (played by Tyne Daly). Maxine is a social worker and each week's show juxtaposes the social work angle and the legal angle. To me, at least, the social work segment is more interesting and carries the show. *Judging Amy* thus resembles *Law & Order* which somehow hit on a winning combination by combining police work and prosecution work in each episode.  And then there are the daytime judge shows, led by *Judge Judy* and her numerous clones. These shows are a phenomenal ratings success, with *Judge Judy* often pulling the highest ratings on daytime TV. The reasons for this success are somewhat obscure. Evidently the daytime TV audience enjoys a voyeuristic look into the tacky problems of the real litigants who duke it out on the show. They seem to welcome receiving bite-size lessons in legal rules. More important, the audience seems to get off on the highly injudicious behavior of the daytime TV judges. Judy Scheindlin berates the litigants for their stupidity and bad manners. Meanwhile, she unashamedly articulates her own moral values and those of her audience ("how come you keep getting pregnant when you can't support the kids you already have?") But the bottom line is that the audience seems to like watching these judges at work.  So, there's hope for a new TV series about the life of trial judges, right? *Queens Supreme* is CBS' bet that people care about what judges do. Personally, I don't think so and predict a quick death for the new show, but what do I know? Even network executives have a terrible record in predicting whether particular pop culture products will find a market--so people like us in the peanut gallery aren't likely to do any better.  The fundamental problem in writing a show about trial judges is to avoid dwelling on the unspeakably tedious work that judges actually do and instead find some way to inject sex and violence into each episode. The debut of *Queens Supreme* did that capably and, I grudgingly admit, I kind of enjoyed it. The episode focuses on Judge Jack Moran, played by Oliver Platt. I have always enjoyed Platt's work and I thought he did a bangup job in the debut episode.  Judge Moran is trying a tort case arising out of a death at a quit-smoking clinic. The jury is hopelessly hung. The jurors really hate each other, particularly one particularly obnoxious juror who is holding out for the plaintiff. He argues that the cold-turkey therapy at the clinic caused a fatal heart attack. Needless to say, that juror is himself a heavy smoker who is having withdrawal symptoms since he can't smoke in the jury room. Jurors who are voting for the defense seem almost equally obnoxious including a preachy high school teacher.  While Judge Moran administers the "Allen charge" (designed to get the jurors to compromise and come up with a unanimous verdict), the obnoxious juror goes berserk, grabs the bailiff's gun, and holds the judge, jurors and court personnel hostage. Although the hostage-taker never figures out what he is trying to do, the episode generates some real suspense. Judge Moran is packing his own heat and a lot of tension arises from whether he's going to go for his gun and shoot it out with the juror.  A back story during this episode concerns Judge Moran's pending divorce. The show opens with his wife trying to get the judge to sign the final divorce papers which he doesn't want to do. And the episode ends with them going to dinner. Left open is whether they're going to give their marriage one more try. So--episode one managed to inject both sex and violence into the humdrum life of big city trial judges. But, to be honest, the funny parts weren't really very funny and the drama parts weren't all that dramatic.  One thing I liked about the show is that it highlighted some real issues about juries. It was very good in underlining how wretchedly unpleasant it can be for jurors to be cooped up in jury rooms wrangling for days with obnoxious people they can't stand and who seem to be completely irrational. The episode raises serious questions about whether our commitment to juries in civil cases makes any sense. Just about nobody else in the world uses juries for cases of this kind. Juries are inefficient, expensive, irrational, and vastly slow up the civil litigation process. They are also a huge intrusion on the lives of ordinary people. We no longer conscript soldiers and we don't force you to vote. Why, exactly, are we still forcing people to serve on civil juries (aside from the fact that civil juries are protected by the Seventh Amendment)?  So, good luck to *Queens Supreme*. I suggest you catch it before it's cancelled.  Posted February 6, 2003 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? Please submit your comments** [**here.**](http://docs.google.com/submit-comments.htm) |  |  | | --- | | [Top of page](#gjdgxs) |  |  | | --- | | [Home](http://docs.google.com/index.html) | [Silver Screen](http://docs.google.com/silver_screen.htm) | [Small Screen](http://docs.google.com/smallscreen/small_screen.htm) | [News & Views](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm) | | |