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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Libby A. White  Legal Writing Instructor  Villanova University School of Law     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Official site](http://www.cbs.com/primetime/queens_supreme/)  [Michael Asimow](http://docs.google.com/queens_asimow.htm)  [Christine Corcos](http://docs.google.com/queens_corcos.htm) |     There is actually little time in the courtroom, which is a shame, since courtroom scenes are great for showcasing oratory and analytical skills, not to mention lessons in group dynamics. For a show that is set in a courthouse, with the main characters as judges, what they actually do for their living is not obvious. | |  | | --- | | ***Queens Supreme* Confusion**  by Libby A. White  After viewing the first two episodes of *Queens Suprem*e, CBS' mid-season submission to the Friday night lineup (10:00 p.m.), I'm still wondering why the powers-that-be at CBS thought it was a brilliant idea to begin the season with the second episode and follow it up with the first. Perhaps they thought that Kristen Johnston's (*Third Rock from the Sun*) guest appearance as a furious, trying-to-be-ex-wife of Judge Jack Moran (played by Oliver Platt) in the opening scene was the attention grabber to set the season. Or perhaps they decided that being mysterious about who is who and what's it all about would get viewers to tune in at least one more time.  For whatever reason, I had the following questions after the "first" episode: 1) who is a judge and who is a law clerk ; 2) why do people seem to hate (a new judge?) Kim Vicidomini (played by Anabella Sciorra); and 3) what is wrong with Judge Moran? After the second episode, the answers are clearer (more on that later). However, I'm still wondering why Judge Moran and Judge Vicidomini carry guns, why they seem to have a hard time keeping them out of the hands of crazed people (more on that later), and if someone will be shooting a gun into a ceiling or window every episode.  *Queens Supreme* has been touted as a "seriocomedy," that is, a comedy with serious overtones. The setting is the Queens County Courthouse in New York City, staffed by four Supreme Court Justices (that's what the lower court judges are called there), two law clerks, and some security personnel who tend to be rather free with their guns. Because Queens is the most ethnically diverse community in the United States (according to the producers), there is an inexhaustible supply of characters and nationalities that could pass through the Queens courtrooms. In addition to Judges Moran and Vicidomini, there is the senior judge, Thomas O'Neill (Robert Loggia, reprising his usual role of wise, reasonable, and sympathetic paternal figure) and Judge Rose Barena (L. Scott Caldwell). The law clarks are Mike Powell (James Madio, known best from "Band of Brothers") and Marcy Harriel (Carmen Hui).  In the "first" episode, after following Judge Moran's wife marching through the courthouse as she tries to find him to sign the divorce papers, we meet Jack Moran. Oliver Platt, a distant relative of Orson Welles (there is a resemblance), plays the central character as a cynical, lovable judge, trying to do good, but going, and acting, a little nuts along the way. He escapes his wife by holing up in his courtroom, attempting to force a hopelessly deadlocked jury to come to decision in a case in which a smoker died of a heart attack, presumably caused by the stress of trying to stop smoking.  The jury is deadlocked because one of the six jurors, who is a heavy smoker himself, thinks the "Butt Breakers" clinic negligently caused the heart attack. Because the jury has been deliberating for three days, the juror holdout is suffering from severe nicotine deprivation. Judge Moran's order to the jury to come to a decision is the catalyst for the smoker to disrupt the courtroom, steal the bailiff's gun, and hold the jury, Judge, bailiff, and law clerk Mike as hostages while he blissfully smokes away in the courtroom ("don't mess with a man and his cigarette"). When tempers get a little hot with the hostages, the juror shoots out a window. At that point, Judge Moran decides to give his gun to the juror as a measure of trust (now that's reality) and then argues the juror's "case" to the jury to show him that he will have a chance at redemption if he lets them go. His argument that sometimes perfectly normal people just "make a mistake" works, and the juror gives up the gun and his hostages. One of the jurors turns to Judge Moran and remarks, "You're a better lawyer than you were a judge."  The "second" episode (directed by Tim Robbins) introduces the courtroom in Queens, the main characters, and their relationships. We learn that Judge Vicidomini is a novice political appointee, with an in at City Hall. Judge Bornea is the most critical of her and her lack of experience, suggesting that she "slept" her way to the job. We also find out that City Hall, namely the Mayor, is very unhappy with Judge Moran and wants him off the bench because he has called the Mayor a "fascist," and because he is too easy on criminal defendants and doesn't following sentencing guidelines. The Bureau of Court Administration decides to suspend Moran for these reasons and for his unorthodox behavior, which includes: 1) singing "Trouble, Right in River City," from *The Music Man*, from the bench to illustrate that just because an elderly woman exercises her First Amendment right to speak (or sing), even if only to herself, does not mean she is incompetent to run her business; and 2) appropriating an amputated penis from a medical malpractice case so he can take a picture of it with him and his law books.  Judge Vicidomini also has an interesting time on her first day as a judge when an outraged father of a rape victim steals her gun and threatens to kill the rapists. Judge Moran intervenes and shoots his gun into the ceiling to scare the father into giving up. He does. Judge Vicidomini also manages to settle the penis case, and then uses her connections as a "Republican Italian" to convince the Mayor to reinstate Moran as a judge.  *Queens Supreme* was conceived by the twin lawyer sons of Queens County Supreme Court Justice Charles J. Thomas, Peter and Daniel Thomas. While they propose to use real "war stories" from their and others' experiences in the courtroom, they admit to some artistic license, including the universal use of the gavel (not used much in real life). So far, it appears perfectly acceptable for judges to be as fully involved, if not more so, than the lawyers in the presentation of evidence, questioning of witnesses, and settling of cases. This makes sense for a show that is focused on trial court judges. Otherwise the reality of motion practice, preliminary hearings, deadly dull direct and cross examinations, and judges who should act more as courtroom referees than as players would not be too entertaining for the average TV audience.  The action is fast, with quick cuts to two or three-person conversations that are intense, but often interlaced with wit and caustic humor, mostly provided by Jack Moran. Oliver Platt has excellent timing and is already well within his character's skin. He introduces just enough self-deprecation and self-criticism to avoid being either too preachy or too irritating in his humor. The remaining characters need more flesh and of course, that will come with time, but the most interesting one so far is the law clerk Mike who adds a certain zing to every scene, perhaps because James Madio is so charismatic. There is actually little time in the courtroom, which is a shame, since courtroom scenes are great for showcasing oratory and analytical skills, not to mention lessons in group dynamics. For a show that is set in a courthouse, with the main characters as judges, what they actually do for their living is not obvious.  The question is, will it last? A well-known and respected cast, top producers (including Aaron Spelling and Julia Roberts), and *A List* directors are great ingredients for a successful run. But with any successful show, the writers make all the difference. I'm already concerned that the characters and stories will be one-dimensional, repetitive and therefore, boring. The first two episodes had many of the same ingredients: Judge Moran acting crazy, but then making sense; Judge Vicidomini seemingly unsure, but then succeeding like a veteran; normal people pulling guns on others because of stress in the courtroom (and guns going off), and Judge Moran saving the day; Judge Barnea criticizing Judge Vicidomini; Judge O'Neill acting as the voice of reason; judges listening to their juries through a bathroom vent; and finally, lawyers looking, and acting, like idiots in the courtroom. It will be interesting to see if the writers can go beyond these beginning themes and give "Queens Supreme" some depth and breadth. If not, the initial challenge of figuring out the first episode may, in hindsight, have been the most entertaining part of the show.  Posted February 6, 2003 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? 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