



**REEL LIFE AND REAL LIFE:** Actors in full combat attire carried the banner of the Jewish Defense League for the benefit of cameras filming the TV docu-drama "Skokie" (photo at left) while, at right, former LIFE reporter Robert Feder watches from a second-story window at Skokie Village Hall as crowds prepare to "greet" a group of neo-Nazis who had announced plans for a demonstration on April 30, 1977. The Nazis only made it as far as the Touhy Avenue exit on Edens Expressway, however, where they were turned back by police carrying a temporary injunction against the rally.

# Was it the mayor vs. the Fonz?

BY DIANE DUBEY  
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RICHIE AND the Fonz proved it once and for all: They are more popular than Mayor Al Smith and a would-be Harvey Schwartz clone named Bert Silverman.



So are Laverne and Shirley, who were presented Nov. 17 in a typically zany half-hour focusing on Shirley's unwilling involvement with a bank robber.

And so it went. Despite heavy network promotion and an apparently compelling topic, the CBS-TV docu-drama "Skokie" trailed the ABC comedy lineup in the Chicago metropolitan area, attracting only 28 percent of the viewing audience, according to Nielsen ratings.

**JUST OVER** 1 million Chicago-area viewers tuned in to the heavily hyped 2½-hour film, joining some 24.8 million who watched in other parts of the country. But, although the numbers sound impressive, the film drew only a 24 percent share nationally, attracting more viewers in the New York City area but fewer in the Los Angeles area than Chicago's 28 percent.

Is this surprising? I'm not sure. To put things in perspective a bit, the film's 24-percent share of the national audience is not very high, particularly for a highly touted program like "Skokie." When the net-

# Who lost the mayor vs. Fonz race?

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works take a look at the Niensens to determine which programs they'll keep and which should be axed, the break-even point for an ongoing series is about 28-29 percent.

If nothing else, examination of these figures can help us to look honestly at ourselves. Our responses during the 1977-78 period of a threatened Nazi demonstration, and our assessment of the film "Skokie."

**NETWORK REQUIREMENTS** notwithstanding, 24 percent of a national viewing audience is a lot of bodies. But the year and a half during which Skokie was perceived as under siege by neo-Nazis was an intense experience, a period during which one issue took precedence over all others on the local scene. It was a time when virtual-

ly every week-night and most Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons offered at least one panel discussion on the Nazi threat. Few local residents didn't, at one time or another, attend some meeting or program or rally that featured a Holocaust survivor speaking movingly of the losses he suffered at the hands of the Nazi animals.

**SO I'M** not sure quite how to judge the absence of interest on a larger scale.

Everyone I know tells stories of trips to other states — or even other countries — with the inevitable punchline of meeting someone who said. "You're from Skokie? Isn't that where the Nazis want to march?"

At first glance at the ratings, I figured these people had lost interest, that time had dulled the interest of all

the letter-writers whose correspondence had convinced Skokie's Mayor Al Smith that his concerns were shared by decent people around the world. After giving the matter more thought, however, I realize that these were the TV watchers who made up the 24 percent. It is astounding — and upsetting — but the other 76 percent probably never gave a damn about Skokie or Nazis or Holocaust survivors in the first place.

It's just that a lot of people really don't care. I figured viewers throughout the Chicago area would be glued to their sets, if only to catch glimpses of familiar places. Personally, I thought the most exciting thing about "Skokie" was seeing the real-life Skokie on TV. But others apparently didn't agree.

What it comes down to is that the

Skokie-Nazi years never had the impact many of us thought they had had outside the Skokie area. In terms of the lessons of history, this seems regrettable. But on the positive side, nearly 25 million people watched the story of a community wrenched by the very idea of a demonstration by those who stand only for hatred, elitism and murder.

There's no doubt now that more Americans would rather watch "Three's Company" and "Too Close for Comfort" than a retelling of an emotion-laden incident that could happen in their own communities. But, putting artistic criticism aside, "Skokie" drew 25 million viewers who apparently were willing to forego an evening of one-liners in exchange for a show that promised a message.

That's a start.