

RAISING ISSUES

Several Current Films Bring Up Good Ideas

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

IT might be a little difficult to prove that producers of American films are overwhelmed with a passion to probe the problems of the day on the screen. An easier thesis to establish is that they tend toward the areas of "escape." But it can't be denied that a goodly number of current questions have been popping up in films of late, either seriously or in the guise of humor, and for that no one is the worse.

Most striking has been the question of freedom to think that is raised in the interesting film "Storm Center," which opens its run at the Normandie tonight. This question has heavily been disturbing our national equanimity for several years, ever since it was noisily insisted that we were being corrupted with Communist ideas. And it had been rather pointedly avoided by the people who made our films.

However, in this picture it is boldly presented in the case of a librarian who is fired from her job and reviled in her community because she refuses to suppress a book called "The Communist Dream." She stoutly resists the local nabobs on a matter of sheer principle. And consequently to this question of freedom to think and exchange ideas she forces an addition of the question of a citizen's civil rights.

Courage. But—

Unfortunately, for all the courage that producer Julian Blaustein and writer-director Daniel Taradash have shown in tackling these serious questions, they have not presented them in such a way that the issues seem wholly realistic or are proved with complete clarity. The case has the curious appearance of a streamlined mechanized plot and the people seem strangely artificial, save for Bette Davis in the leading role. Miss Davis gives a credible performance as the librarian who is dumped and then harassed, but the rest of the people in the picture are like scoundrels in an old-fashioned play.

Even so, and for all its shortcomings, "Storm Center" brings up some ideas that should receive wider circulation. These are such ideas as the effect of fear-mongering on our children and it is good to see them being brought up on the screen.

One may not think that the question of how a corporation is run—for the benefit of the stockholders or for the benefit of a special few—is precisely a burning issue, but it is made to seem pretty hot in "The Solid Gold Cadillac" at the Victoria. And, indeed, it may still be pretty warm for anybody who, like the heroine of this picture, owns ten shares of a dubious company's stock.

Anyhow, it is raised with much good humor in this conspicuously irreverent farce. So, however you feel about the subject, it is coming up on the screen. Furthermore, Judy Holliday is so funny she is almost subversive in the role of a stockholder who stubbornly badgers a board of directors, drives it to ruin and herself to control of the corporation. Paul Douglas assists her cheerfully.