

Pathfinder

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MR. AVERAGE CITIZEN. Jimmy Stewart plays him admirably. (SEE: *Spirit of America*)

Spirit of America

It's a Wonderful Life (Liberty-RKO) is a kind of modern morality play, with James Stewart playing Everyman.

Hero Stewart has a pretty un-wonderful time. His dreams go bust, one after another. His frustrations pile sky-high. Even though he is supposed to be just an ordinary guy, the plot has to make him an indispensable man. He's the mainstay of his home town's Building & Loan Association.

Bad Man. Cruel old Lionel Barrymore, who owns every busline, department store, and bank for miles around, is Stewart's arch-enemy. Lionel thinks people are cattle. Let 'em live in the slums and pay high rents, he says. Stewart fights this idea with every breath in his skinny body, for weary year after weary year. He is comforted and encouraged by his pretty wife, Donna Reed, and his noisy, affectionate children.

But one day the hero's uncle loses the Building & Loan's bankroll. He absent-mindedly drops it in Banker Barrymore's lap, rolled up in a newspaper. Barrymore promptly salts it away and threatens Stewart with foreclosure and prison.

Enter the Angel. In despair, Stewart does what so many others have done: He wishes he'd never been born. At this point his guardian angel, a wingless, foolish-looking fellow, tells him his wish has

been granted.

Stewart runs through the town, but no one recognizes him, because he's never been born. The angel warns him that "each man's life touches so many other lives that when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole." Stewart discovers that, deprived of his own kindness and understanding, his girl-friend would have become a sour spinster. Minus the Building & Loan Company, the townspeople would have had to live in hovels.

Happy Ending. Horrified, Stewart cries that he didn't mean it, that he wants everything to be as it was, that he'll gladly face prison and disgrace. The angel grants him this second wish and Stewart runs happily home. He finds that his neighbors have pooled their savings to make up the \$8,000. Moral: No man is a failure who has friends.

It's a Wonderful Life gets sticky now and then. In spite of that, this first post-war collaboration of Actor Stewart and Director Frank Capra is an excellent film. It packs plenty of charm, humor, honest pathos and, at times, sharp observation of the American scene.

Stewart gives a moving performance. The other players are also first-rate, particularly Miss Reed as the wife, Henry Travers as the angel, and H. B. Warner as a druggist. Only Lionel Barrymore, made up to look like Humpty Dumpty, descends to caricature.