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YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU (1938)

Directed by Frank Capra

WEDNESDAY January 28th 7PM

SATURDAY MATINEE January 31st 2PM

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Frank Capra's **You Can't Take It With You** (1938) opens with banker Anthony Kirby in his boardroom, surrounded by other capitalists, planning "the largest individual monopoly in the world." They're merging their munitions interests and have bought up nearly 14 square blocks to build their factory. Only one property stands in their way: the Sycamore/Vanderhof household refuses to sell.

Grandpa Martin Vanderhof, played by Lionel Barrymore, simply won't participate. His family lives in cheerful chaos; Penny writes plays that will never be produced, Essie practices ballet with no intention of performing professionally, Paul makes fireworks in the basement for the joy of it. None of them work for wages. They do what they love because they love it, not because it generates profit.

This drives banker Kirby insane. He can't comprehend people who aren't driven by accumulation. When his son Tony (James Stewart) falls for Alice Sycamore (Jean Arthur), the only "normal" member of this eccentric household, Kirby sees it as a threat to everything he's built.

Adapted by Robert Riskin from the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, the film won Best Picture and Best Director at the 1938 Academy Awards. On the surface, it's screwball comedy; underneath, it's a surprisingly radical critique of monopoly capitalism.

For our series examining how systems manufacture criminality and force complicity, **You Can't Take It With You** offers the counterpoint. After three weeks of watching systems grind people to dust, here's a household that opts out entirely and wins. They refuse to participate in capitalism, and their refusal works.

Grandpa has a line about "ism-mania" that resonates: "Communism, fascism, voodooism. Everybody's got an ism these days. Nowadays they say 'think the way I do or I'll bomb the daylights out of you.'" The film suggests there's a third option beyond compliance or destruction; you can just... not participate.

Capra's reputation for "feel-good" movies often obscures how politically sharp his work actually was. His father was crushed to death in factory machinery; his family lost their ranch and returned to poverty. **You Can't Take It With You** imagines what utopia might look like, but it's a utopia built on property ownership and principled refusal, not on reforming the system.

Peak Capra chaos and joy. An eccentric household makes fireworks, refuses to pay taxes, and teaches a ruthless banker about what actually matters.