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SOME OF MY WORST FRIENDS

Crossfire, at this writing, has just completed six weeks at the Rivoli Theatre in New York, and is continuing to run. Business has been splendid even boff in the big city. The picture has been seen in a few resort towns on the Atlantic seaboard. Reports from there are incomplete but aggregate grosses on the first day had the picture running \$150 behind The Hucksters, which is the most boff of the pictures currently running. This means, I gather, that the box office is not as pessimistic about Crossfire as some people are.

From the very beginning Crossfire has been the victim of a strong minority pessimism. It would be easy to say that its source was antisemitic, which in part it was. But chiefly it stemmed from sources that had genuine anxiety about the project and thought it would be better left alone. Pictures should be made on the subject, the sources said, but not Crossfire. Others among the minority said Crossfire should be made but it should be done differently. Still others: If it were done badly, it would cause more antisemitism. Still others: If it were done well, it would be those smart Jews in Hollywood at work, and this, too, would not have the effect of abating but rather increasing antisemitism.

This is the partial, bewildering context of Crossfire's inception; the whole of it is monumental.

The first rumbling of an antisemitic nature came to us when the project was first announced. A troubled few had difficulty assigning the right motives to the making and to the

makers of Crossfire. Eddie Dmytryk was labeled a Jew. It was said that I was a Jew, too, a fact which I had managed to conceal for many years but which now came out since I was involved in the project. Of John Paxton, who wrote the screen play, it was noted by someone who read the script that he couldn't possibly have been this brilliant about antisemitism unless he himself was an antisemite. Finally, it was said categorically that the whole bunch at RKO involved in this project were Jews.

We were not accorded the professional's right of evaluating the contemporary scene or the right of feeling compassion for our fellow men. Nor were we accorded a fundamental Hollywood right of considering ourselves fairly good business men for attempting to make a good picture with a new and vital theme. These, incidentally, were our motives. They haven't changed. We continue to like them.

Since the picture's release the original pessimism has taken some new forms but mostly the old forms remain intact. Naturally, it was very rewarding to find majority opinion behind the film's content, praising the fact that it was done, deploring the fact that it was necessary to be done. But minority opinion has let out a loud wail, placing its attack in the context of that indefatigable cliché that Hollywood has not grown up. The specific attack is confining itself to certain issues in the picture.

Minority opinion attaches itself to what it considers a formidable weakness in content, not quality. In most cases the picture gets a grudgingly proffered "A" in quality. This minority view seems less an opinion -- even a complex opinion --

than it does a fascinating and tortuous obscurity. But despite this, and despite its irrelevance, it is well and articulately done. It is, therefore, considerably more dangerous.

Here it is.

Crossfire, the argument goes, concerns itself with "lunatic fringe" antisemitism (which it principally does). But, because it deals with lunatic fringe antisemitism, it separates itself from majority antisemitic practice. Because it separates itself from majority antisemitic practice, the film is not about you and me.

The argument shifts and proceeds: The "you and me" kind of antisemitism is chiefly the social discrimination variety - the kind which keeps Jews out of a club or a hotel or a camp, which says the Jews own the motion picture industry, which they clearly do not. And this "you and me" kind, it is argued, since it has to do with the kind of antisemitism practiced by most Americans, is the kind one ought to make a picture about.

Because Crossfire does not deal with this variety of antisemitism, the film is not only not about you and me but is is, moreover, not valid and not true.

Crossfire is not valid and not true because (1) lunatic fringe antisemitism either does not exist or it does exist but it is not important; or (2) it is important but it just doesn't happen as it does in Crossfire; or (3) if it does happen, the picture's attack is nevertheless too confined, it is not a definitive picture of antisemitism: therefore, it will not promote understanding of antisemitism; or (4) the antisemite, Monty, in Crossfire, for a variety of obscure reasons, will be considered

the hero -- audiences will sympathize with him, identify themselves with him. As a result the picture will have the opposite effect of the one intended.

It would be stupid to deny the charge -- and it has become a charge -- about the "you and me" business. It should be freely admitted at the outset: Crossfire is not about you and me. When work was started some two years ago, it was purposely designed not to be about you and me. Its attack was limited and confined; its story was limited and confined, as is the story of almost any theatrical experience. To attempt to do a definitive study of antisemitism in one picture is a fool's errand. It is proper material for pamphlets and books. But even in these media it is doubtful if definitiveness is possible. Look at the literature which has investigated antisemitism. Find, if you can, a one-volume definitive analysis.

Most of the minority charges against Crossfire probably dismiss themselves, crumbling with their own faulty and insubstantial structure. But the charge that the lunatic fringe antisemitism of Crossfire is invalid and untrue is just silly enough to be picked up by groups which engage wilfully in antisemitism. For this reason it should be answered.

Lunatic fringe antisemitism is important, dangerously and terribly important. It was important in Hitler's Reich and in Czarist Russia, and in most of the countries of Europe at some time. The social discrimination variety is important, too; so is every minor or major practice which goes to make up the whole hateful body of antisemitic practice. And anyone who attempts to

estimate which kind of antisemitism is most important or which which should have the most emphasis announces an incomplete understanding of antisemitism.

Monty, the antisemite in Crossfire, exists. This very night he is roaming the streets of Queens, N.Y., looking for a Jew to beat up. He has already beaten up many. He has associates. They are looking to prove their superiority by kicking around someone they consider decidedly inferior. They want a scapegoat for their own insecurity and maladjustment. They are ignorant and organized. They hoot and howl with fanatic energy at the Messianic raving of Gerald L. K. Smith. They are the storm troopers of tomorrow. If this country were depressed enough to fall victim to a Leader, these men would qualify brilliantly for the chieftains of American Buchenwalds and Dachaus.

Such a group, the native American fascist, organized and disciplined, is a threat to the Jews, and to the entire population. It is depressing at this point in our history to find it necessary to say that.

It is also depressing, after the experience of Crossfire, to hear the fancies which are currently being distributed about Gentleman's Agreement. This is again a minority opinion, as in the case of Crossfire. And it is something which the makers of Gentleman's Agreement will face and undoubtedly answer.

The lunatic fringe charge, of course, is not made against Gentleman's Agreement. The charge here is that Gentleman's Agreement has a dubious device; that, while the book has some fine things to say about antisemitism, the point of departure is unsound

You may have heard it. It goes like this: Gentleman's Agreement has a great angle -- a slick, glib and familiar angle -- but it does not truthfully correspond with experience. The protagonist, Green, who pretends to be a Jew, is not really going through what a Jew goes through. Thus, the picture will have a sense of not happening, or at best, happening in vacuum. The end result will be special -- as special as the problem it poses -- and, therefore, not effective against total antisemitism.

This is an interesting deviation from the criticism of Crossfire. Remember, Crossfire did not correspond with majority antisemitic practice? Well, Gentleman's Agreement does. But even though Gentleman's Agreement has selected the proper kind of antisemitism to attack, it's no good because the method of attack is no good!

Discussions of antisemitism on this level are weird and unreal. They are debates in limbo. Nobody really cares how they come out. But they are important, recklessly important, for they throw off antisemitic particles to be used and to be expanded in the whole body of antisemitic practice.

The plain, simple fact is that the device of Gentleman's Agreement is brilliant for its purpose. To describe sharply the villainy of antisemitism, a man is persecuted and deprived simply because he says he is a Jew. If it is a trick, it is a Swiftian trick. It, furthermore, lends itself to a savage and ruthless exposition of antisemitism.

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During the preparation of Crossfire we had no notion what the specific effect of the picture would be on the antisemitic and non-antisemitic population. There was no possible way of gauging this except by making a picture and finding out what happened. The full potential impact of a motion picture cannot be completely determined by its script, nor is it possible to survey scientifically the effect of the final product. Anti-semitism is slippery and takes many forms. A picture could affect one form and not another.

We hoped the effect would be enormous. We weren't so sanguine as to expect the picture would, in one fell swoop, eradicate antisemitism. But we did know that public discussion and lively debate have a valuable place in a democratic society. The air could be cleared. The problem could be more clearly visualized. We hoped for this, for more clarity.

Although we rejected the minority disturbance, we nevertheless wondered about it. We wondered, for example, if it had reached our fellow professionals, and if not, would they have the minority reservation without having experienced minority influence.

We decided to ask and to ask further what was their opinion of the possible effect of the picture. We hoped it would be like ours. It wouldn't prove anything scientifically, but it would describe an attitude---whether that attitude was favorably inclined toward this project and others like it; whether that attitude properly stimulated would be the beneficiary of further attitudes and further action against antisemitism. We simply wanted to know the effect---any kind of effect---on professionals and we could get this simply by asking.

A poll was conducted. The specific question of "effect" was asked and one other: Is it possible to end antisemitism in America? This latter produced some lively results. The questionees freely spoke their minds.

Here are the answers:

Answer Number One. Number One thought the effect of pictures dealing with antisemitism would be enormous. They would be applauded by the country as a whole, by legislators, educators, churches, etc. He was quite certain that on people of good will who were unconscious of their own antisemitic practice the effect would be positive; i.e., in the future they would resist antisemitic impulses and be wary of antisemitic practice in others. He felt the pictures would have no effect on the practicing anti-semite, the semi-fascist, who would conclude that those pictures were all Jewish inspired. He thought that antisemitism could be ended in America if all the media of communication lent themselves to the project. The project would need the endless cooperation of radio, newspapers, motion pictures, educators and school systems. He added ruefully that although it could be done, it probably wouldn't simply because the media themselves would develop insuperable obstacles to their ever getting together. They would not consider it their job fundamentally. It would belong to somebody else.

Answer Number Two. Number Two was uncertain as to what the effect of pictures exposing antisemitism would be. Undoubtedly, on some people there would be a salutary effect but he wondered how permanent the effect would be. Attacking aspects of antisemitism in pictures would certainly neutralize to a great

extent those aspects but wouldn't antisemitism find new ways of exploiting itself? Wouldn't it rise in new forms? Wouldn't it transfer itself to other minorities, the Negroes, for example? He hadn't really thought enough about it, but despite his hesitations he felt that the fact that pictures were being made was a great stride forward. He thought antisemitism and all minority prejudice could be removed from the American scene by proper educational methods but he would not attempt to guess how long this would take.

Answer Number Three. Number Three couldn't estimate or guess at the effect of the pictures being made but he was proud they were being made. Proud of the industry and himself (he was working on one of the pictures). He didn't know how long it would take but he knew it could be done, citing himself as an example. Until he was 28 years old he was antisemitic himself. Not active and not vicious. When he first came to New York from a small Nebraska town, he'd never to his knowledge met a Jew. There weren't any in his town and yet the town was antisemitic. During a time he was out of work in New York, he roamed around the city -- in the slums, middle class and wealthy areas. Particularly in the slums his antisemitism was confirmed. He would see dirty people, fat, sloppy. His simple standard of judgment was that he wouldn't like to be invited into these peoples' houses to sit at their table. The thought revolted him. These were Jews. In later years, when his perspective had changed, he confessed to himself that he never knew for certain whether these "dirty, sloppy people" were Jews. They could have been anything: Irish, Polish, Hungarians, or what they actually were, Americans. His real hate was for poverty and the dirt and

filth that accompany it. He hated the wrong things; he hated the people instead of the conditions that made people that way. Today he says, "If the seed of antisemitism could be removed from me, it can be removed from anybody -- when educated properly."

Answer Number Four. Number Four felt that the pictures being made were a drop in a bucket. No more. To be really effective, a national campaign of education was necessary, including the help of motion pictures, newspapers, radio, publishers, legislators, congressmen, senators, presidents, school system and the whole American people. That they could ever get together was an idea which should be properly patronized. But if they did, and stayed together, the demise of antisemitism could be estimated as a certainty in a very short time.

Answer Number Five. Number Five applauded the pictures being made. He was not interested as a professional in the specific effect of these pictures -- he knew it would be good. He didn't know how widespread the effect would be. He felt the violent antisemite would ignore and actively campaign against the pictures. He felt that even certain people of good will, unconscious of their antisemitic prejudice, ignorant of the full meaning of antisemitism, would pick on the pictures and try very hard to find something wrong with them. But all this was irrelevant. What was important was that the most effective voice in the country had the guts to stand up and say antisemitism was wrong. Not only was it education for the people but it was education for the professional. Here was a precedent upon which to operate. Here was a precedent which excites and stimulates the

professional to examine his own work. As a good citizen, he wanted antisemitism to end. Antisemitism, or any minority prejudice was the tool of the semi-fascist and the fascist, something to use against the country as a whole, and against him and his family. It was a machine by which democracy could be liquidated. He was certain that antisemitism could be ended. He didn't care how long it took, so long as something in a big way was done to combat it.

Answer Number Six. This man was an executive in the industry. He couldn't determine the effect of the pictures. But he was convinced that this was a proper step and he hoped the pictures would make a lot of money, for, he argued, this would guarantee that many people would see them. But whether money was made or not was not of first importance. Whether the pictures were big successes, moderate successes or miserable failures was not of first importance. The importance was the public service. The industry occasionally should make pictures, he felt, with the objective of servicing democratic institutions. He considered prejudice of any kind anti-democratic. If the pictures fail, they should be written off and made available to anyone or any organization that wanted to show them.

Answer Number Seven. This man was a veteran. He thought it was possible to neutralize antisemitism and having been abroad in Germany he thought we damn well better had. Antisemitism in pre-Hitler Germany was far less extensive than it is here now. He was appalled when he came home from the war at the extent to

which we have continued to underestimate minority prejudice. We have learned some lessons from the war, he thought, but we have not learned enough. We have failed to understand that with existing prejudices against the Jews and the Negroes and other minorities, it would be simple -- so very simple -- for an American Fuhrer to whip this country into a violent and ghastly hatred as a step toward the eventual destruction of our democratic institutions. In depression, which our most conservative economists agree is coming, the soil for demagoguery grows rich and fertile. The minority becomes the scapegoat and the scapegoat the smokescreen for anti-democratic activity. In this context, anyone who subscribes to full democratic practice is expendable.

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These are some of the answers. There were more, about twenty in all but there isn't enough space to report them.

On the whole the experiment, however unscientific it might seem to Mr. Gallup, was successful. A majority approved the pictures, were pleased that the subject was being aired in frank terms, agreed that the techniques so far developed for battling antisemitism have been proved miserable failures.

One opinion was violent on the subject of the frail intellectual who would snipe and pick and submit his own anxiety as proof that these pictures will cause more antisemitism - - whose real position when examined closely would prevent pictures on antisemitism from being made at all.

Everyone realized it was a gigantic job to neutralize

antisemitism but that perhaps as a result of these pictures, activity would be hastened. But there was no absolute, positive guarantee that this would be done. It seemed rather that the only positive guarantee was that antisemitism would continue.

This is true. Antisemitism will continue. The pictures when they have been released nationally and have completed their runs, will certainly have the effect of abating somewhat the virulence of antisemitism. But at best the effect is temporary. These pictures are no permanent cure. For a year or perhaps five years they will be shown and used, but in the end, they cannot be counted on to handle the job of servicing a nation riddled with prejudice. There is no proof that any program, legislative or educational, now in work is large enough in scope to defend successfully our people against prejudice of whatever kind.

Although the poll confirmed our hopes about Crossfire, it brought to the foreground a new and grave concern. The motion picture industry has lifted the lid on a controversy on a national scale; it will hardly accrue to its credit to allow that controversy to be debated or aired superficially.

Medicine would not put a highly infectious patient in a fine hospital bed and deny him the use of penicillin. Motion pictures cannot make two or five or even ten films and announce their responsibility has been discharged. If the industry believes, and not simply pays lip service to the notion that American life guarantees freedom from prejudice, as the pictures on antisemitism will say directly or indirectly, then clearly there is a responsibility facing the industry.

That responsibility, very simply, is to implement the job already started.

In the course of conducting the poll, a number of gifted people said they were available for use in combating minority prejudice. This was enough encouragement to ask other people among our actors, directors, producers and writers if they would be willing to give their services to making pictures on antisemitism and minority prejudice.

No one refused.

They agreed to make time if they were busy. They were all stimulated by the prospect and not a few pointed out a precedent exists. During the war, services of creators were donated free. No studio in the business made a penny on pictures produced for the Army or Navy during wartime. True, this was a national crisis, but as someone pointed out, there is a crisis among minorities. When any minority is abused, degraded or deprived of earning a living, this constitutes a crisis for the entire nation.

The broad program is yet to be devised. But suppose it went something like this:

The program of pictures would be shorts -- documentaries if you prefer that word -- made by some of the industry's finest craftsmen. Individually, they would deal with one aspect of anti-minority practice. They would be designed for the consumption of all age groups. For the very young, obviously a cartoon. For college groups, a more mature analysis. One picture could possibly lay low the infamous "Christ killer" legend. Another

could treat with antisemitism among the Negroes. Several could be devoted to the historical aspects of antisemitism. And so on, until the whole body of antisemitism is exposed.

These pictures would be made with the assistance of experts -- psychologists, social workers, effective fighters against race and minority prejudice.

They would be made available free of charge to anyone who requested them. To social organizations, to school systems, to labor organizations, to colleges, to motion picture exhibitors, etc., etc.

Twenty shorts would be enough to start the program, enough to service the country for five years, say. A production expert figures, with services donated by those who can afford it, the pictures should cost less than \$10,000 apiece. My very poor arithmetic makes the price per day for five years about one hundred dollars per day.

If this job is done, if these pictures are made, the nation will be given the machinery by which a large scale operation can be instituted. Everyone applauds the yearly campaigns of good will organizations to combat prejudice; but these good will organizations do not have enough weapons. One week, every year, is not enough time to devote to the destruction of prejudice. Doctors would go mad if they were permitted to work only one week on the cure for polio or cancer. We would still have syphilis if Ehrlich assigned one week a year to find his specific. It's a full-time job. To destroy a mass prejudice, a mass instrument is necessary. A motion picture program is the start. But a big start.

Clearly, we have the facilities in this country democratically mobilized to work effectively for the destruction of antisemitism or any minority prejudice. Tragedy will befall us if as a result of the program spontaneously combusting nothing is done to follow it up. The time will be ripe a few months hence for action. A certain conditioning in public thinking will have taken place. The challenge of action will then face us.

Some of my worst friends are those who ignore or refuse to accept this challenge.

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Adrian Scott, typescript of "Some of My Worst Friends," summer 1947.
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