

★ Virginia Wright

Drama Editor

In a recent issue of *Boxoffice*, a motion picture trade magazine, Dore Schary editorialized in favor of enlarged screen experiments with new ideas. While this guest editorial was directed to film exhibitors, Schary's words deserve a hearing before the paying public.

As executive vice president in charge of RKO Radio Production, Schary already has backed up his convictions with an important experiment, "Crossfire," Hollywood's first attack on the growth of anti-Semitism in the United States.

This Adrian Scott production, which was given the go-ahead signal almost as soon as Schary assumed office, coupled with Schary's own previous production of the politically satirical "Farmer's Daughter," is sufficient evidence that he means what he says when he insists that "motion pictures can be a happy blending of entertainment and education."

Here, in detail, is what Schary had to say to the nation's exhibitors:

"Many producers believe that the postwar future of motion pictures lies solely in the field of entertainment. Many others feel that the delivery of a 'message' should be the first function of future films.

"At the risk of being labeled a middle-of-the-road philosopher, I contend that motion pictures can be a happy blending of entertainment and education, and that such a compromise is definitely due at this time.

A responsibility

"Our responsibility as citizens and picture makers is to make sure that no one gets us into another war. We've got to point out in our films that World War II was worth fighting; that it destroyed Nazism; that the past was worth living and that the future will be more worth living because of the past.

"If we contribute to cynicism and disillusion, as so many of the films that followed the first World War did, we will have failed in our job. We must be alert and vigilant, be willing to portray whatever evil and sinister forces spring up, and attack them by the use of our talents and our skill and our power as a medium.

"Some may say that the exhibitors will not like this; that they will back away from it on the grounds of poor boxoffice. But there is no genuine reason for the exhibitor to fear that his theatre will be turned into a pulpit. For one thing, skilled picture makers and men interested in making money will make pictures that will have good stars, top direction and top entertainment—and I don't know of any good picture ever that was a failure.

"If you will look at the ten boxoffice attractions of the year and compare them with the ten best pictures of the year, you will find an amazing duplication. The exhibitor has to stop being worried every time someone tells him a picture is about something. The exhibitor should be reminded that every picture is about something.

"The same point may be raised about theatre audiences. Will they stay away from films with a message? The answer here is the same. Audiences must learn and be willing to accept pictures that are about something. Audiences are no longer the babies they were years ago, and producers must not underestimate the intelligence of the men and women they are seeking to attract to the theatre. If they are given more adult fare, they'll thrive on the diet, and so will the exhibitor and the picture maker—and so will the world.

"Hollywood will not follow any given entertainment pattern in these postwar years, but will explore a variety of story fields never before placed on the screen. There are many intelligent adult subjects not yet touched upon, which writers and directors with imagination will find and develop.

Novelty breeds success

"In the highly competitive present and future which confronts producers, the most successful ones will avoid too conventional story ideas and step off the beaten trail to experiment with new ideas. It won't be such a perilous experiment, either, for in the history of the screen some of the biggest boxoffice hits have been made by producers who took a chance and strayed from the run-of-the-mill formula.

"There must be a steady and consistent effort to improve motion pictures, starting with the basic story idea and continuing through every phase of the filming of the picture. No picture is worth making if its makers are indifferent and fail to achieve a solid point of view.

"What constitutes good boxoffice today—romance, melodrama and family life—will be good boxoffice in 1956, just as it was in 1916 and 1926. The

(Continued on Page 30, Col. 3)

Daily News 27
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
FRIDAY, JULY 25, 1947

same showmanship and boxoffice value that existed before the war undoubtedly exist now.

"In discussing pictures that will make money in the postwar world, we get back to the same old business of one man's guess being neither better nor worse than another's. But it should be remembered that, in the main, only methods and personalities change. What in one era was best expressed by Theda Bara is, in another era, best expressed by Lauren Ba-

call; and what in one era was best expressed by Valentino is later best expressed by Van Johnson.

"To sum up the future of motion pictures in a broad and elastic sense, I believe that all picture personalities, picture makers and organizations must develop in this postwar world a strength of purpose and character that has been lacking. They must refuse to be intimidated by un-Americans who talk about Americanism, and by special groups that have everything to lose by the screen's becoming articulate."

Virginia Wright, Los Angeles Daily News, July 15, 1947.
Courtesy Dore Schary Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.