

## CROSS FIRE

### A Discussion Among Experts

On Thursday, June 19th, at the invitation of Dr. David M. Levy of New York, the following individuals attended a special showing of the film Cross Fire and, with few exceptions, adjourned for dinner and an extended discussion about the film:

| <u>Name</u>         | <u>Organization or Professional Affiliation</u>                                   |
|---------------------|---|
| Nathan Ackerman     | Psychiatrist  |
| John Cotton         | Psychiatrist  |
| Elliot Cohen        | Editor, Commentary Magazine   |
| Mandel E. Cohen     | Professor Research Psychiatry Tufts Medical School                                |
| Isadore Chein       | Commission on Community Interrelations  |
| Philip Eisenberg    | Research Psychologist, Columbia Broadcasting System                               |
| Albert Furth        | Managing Editor, Fortune Magazine   |
| Josette Frank       | Child Study Association, Consultant childrens' comics and radio programs          |
| Samuel H. Flowerman | Department of Scientific Research, American Jewish Committee                      |
| John Harding        | Commission on Community Interrelations  |
| Herta Herzog        | Research Director, McCann Erickson  |
| Marie Jahoda        | Department of Scientific Research, American Jewish Committee                      |
| A. Kardiner         | Ass't. Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Columbia Medical School                     |
| Arthur Kornhauser   | Bureau Applied Social Research, Consultant Industrial Psychology                  |
| Ernst Kris          | Psychiatrist, Specialist in Propaganda  |
| Sigfried Krakauer   | Author - "Caligari to Hitler"   |
| Ruth Kotinsky       | Bureau for Intercultural Education  |
| Leo Lowenthal       | Institute of Social Research, Sociologist   |
| Paul Lazarsfeld     | Director, Bureau Applied Social Research, Professor Sociology Columbia University |
| A. A. Lumsdaine     | Institute of Human Relations, Yale University, Movie Research Section             |
| David Levy          | Psychiatrist  |
| Margaret Mead       | Anthropologist  |
| Robert K. Merton    | Associate Director, Bureau of Applied Social Research                             |
| John Millet         | Psychiatrist - attended movie only  |
| Scudder Mekeel      | Anthropologist  |
| Herman Nunberg      | Psychiatrist  |
| John Peatman        | Associate Professor Psychology, City College of New York                          |
| Sandor Rado         | Psychiatrist  |
| Louis Rath          | Professor Educational Psychology, New York University                             |
| Harry Rivlin        | Associate Professor Queens College, Specialist Mental Hygiene                     |
| Richard Rothschild  | Department of Public Edu. and Information, American Jewish Committee              |
| Rudolf Schindler    | Psychiatrist, Vocational Advisory Service   |
| John Slawson        | Executive Vice President, American Jewish Committee                               |
| Clara Thompson      | Psychiatrist, Washington School of Psychiatry                                     |
| Frank Trager        | National Program Director, Anti-Defamation League                                 |
| Richardson Wood     | Specialist Public Opinion Research - Movie Only                                   |
| Gerhart Wiebe       | Research Psychologist, Columbia Broadcasting System                               |

Immediately after the showing of the film a brief questionnaire was filled in by those present. The results of the questionnaire are appended to these notes.

Summary of Discussion

The discussion centered around two main areas: an appraisal of the film and suggestions for its scientific evaluation.

On the whole, the participants at the discussion regarded Cross Fire as a fine tribute to the movie industry, indicating its awareness of important social issues and its concern for producing movies of social significance. A movie such as Cross Fire was regarded to be of potential value - assuming that certain defects could be removed - if it were followed up by similar movies.

With some exceptions the general consensus of opinion was that the showing of Cross Fire would certainly not be harmful. However, with some individuals disagreeing, it was thought that the picture as a propaganda piece would not be very effective in a positive manner. This low expectation of its positive impact was based mainly on the recognition that prejudice is a deep seated phenomenon not easily subject to change; that a "single shot" could not be reasonably assumed to change such deep seated attitudes; and also that some shortcomings in the film itself might impair its effectiveness.

Many of the statements made during the discussion were frankly acknowledged as speculative hunches which might be investigated more thoroughly in a scientific evaluation. But unless backed up by empirical research it was felt that perhaps these hunches were of limited value. However, it was suggested that in the absence of formal research data the contributions made by the discussants constituted an advance over the absence of any information or knowledge. It was generally agreed that in order to gather empirical data it would be a good idea to have the picture shown as planned by the producers.

The discussants saw many faults - artistic as well as psychologic - in the film, some of which they felt were due to the transplantation from the original story dealing with homosexuality in the "Brick Fox Hole" to the movie, Cross Fire.

In addition to suggestions for testing the effects of the film many suggestions were made with regard to the film in its present form.

In conclusion it ought to be said that if the suggestions and ideas of the discussants are of any value then the full impact of their psychological insight could have been most profitably utilized by the producers and director of the film in various stages of its production from the early "treatment" through various phases of the production.

#### Appraisal of the Film

The critique of the film can be conveniently summarized under three main headings: I. Critique of the Story; II. Critique of the Characterization; III. Hunches on Effectiveness.

##### I. Critique of the Story

1. Some individuals objected to the "Judas" theme in which a "sweet, dumb, innocent guy" (Le Roy) turns against a buddy, thus betraying the kind of ingroup loyalty one would expect to find in the United States Army. It may be inadvisable to have the Army Major approve the Judas operation because of Army esprit de corps. Others found no objection to the "Judas" theme, particularly because LeRoy comes out on the side of law and order in the end; buddy loyalty, they felt, has often been considerably overrated and thus GI's generally would not have identified with Monty.

2. There was almost uniform agreement that the ending was unfortunate. It was seen as a cold-blooded shooting of a human being. No clear cut explanation was apparent to the discussants of why it was necessary to have Monty killed in the manner in which he was killed. Many suggestions were made such as having Monty first open fire on the cops; or having him shot in the leg; or possibly having him captured. Besides he is alone in the street and is attempting to flee on foot from a squad car of police who could easily have captured him. Why then was Monty killed in this manner?

3. A great opportunity was missed in not showing Monty in relation to his society. How did he develop his attitudes? Merely eliminating Monty doesn't eliminate the problem of anti-Semitism. It would have been better to give the audience an opportunity to see why and how Monty developed into an anti-Semite, and that there were other people like him. This could have been achieved, it was suggested, by making Monty tell his life story after having been wounded; or by his buddies discussing him at the end of the picture. (Many felt that the handling of his death by his buddies was extremely obtuse and lacking in sting). Monty's conflicts are never made clear and are never resolved.

4. The action in the story doesn't ring true because of the effort to adapt the story of the Brick Fox Hole which deals with homosexuality to this film.

## II. Critique of the Characterization

5. Many people felt that perhaps Monty was too attractive, too virile a character. Others with experience with GI's thought that Monty in army life was not likely to be a popular character because of his tendency to bully others; that if anything he would be feared more than admired.

6. The opinions about Mitchell were somewhat varied but for the most part there was a feeling that perhaps he was just a little too weak and confused a character.

7. Sgt. Keeley, some thought, was not played up enough; as one of the "hero" characters, he did not appear to be as virile as Monty. On this point too there was disagreement. Some felt that Keeley was virile but controlled his virility in a desirable manner; and that certainly he showed his guts, particularly when speaking up to "superiors!"

8. Most people felt that not enough was ever known about the Jew. He is a figure-head who disappears before one can develop any sympathy for him. If the aim of the picture is to do something about anti-Semitism it was suggested that the characterization and portrayal of the Jew would have to be developed further so that some identification with him could be achieved. The Jew was seen as an almost too rational person, a kind of "wise guy" who sticks his nose where it doesn't belong and obtains power over Mitchell. It is never made clear whether he was badly wounded or not at Okinawa. The impression is also left of the fight at the beginning of the picture that the Jew doesn't fight back hard enough when attacked. The Jew is actually seen as so mysterious a character as easily to be taken by some members of the audience as perhaps a crook or confidence man. Certainly his characterization is in no way enhanced by his girl friend; nor is his relationship with her ever made very clear. No identification with the victim is possible. Hence if the goal of the film is to change a negative attitude to a positive one it does nothing to accomplish this purpose.

9. The detective was identified as a member of a minority group and some people wondered whether this was a good idea. In general it was felt that sympathy would gravitate toward this smooth detective. A few people wondered whether it was wise to have the tolerance speech come from a member of the police force.

### III. Hunches on Effectiveness

10. The sermonizing of the detective seemed to some people drawn out and somewhat "preachy". Also because the propaganda message is "buried" in the context of a thrill movie some believe that the message would have no effect: the overall impression would be that of a murder mystery and a contest between Monty and the police, the propaganda part of the film being only a "straw in the wind".

11. The opinion was also expressed that people go to the movies for entertainment and that therefore the movies cannot be used for reform. Especially in a thriller, they maintain, the audience would be particularly sensitive toward preaching a sermon (like the detective's speech about his grandfather) and resent such interference with their fun to an extent that might prevent the message from being effective. These people felt that education is out of place in the movies and is resented by movie goers.

12. It was anticipated that with children the effect of the picture would be largely that of a "cops and robbers" film with considerable identification with the cop. It is not expected that the kids will know that the murder was committed because of the anti-Semitism of the killer. If they do think about the main theme at all they are likely to be confused. Perhaps in a sense what applies to children will also apply to adults.

13. For many average movie goers multiple identifications are possible as carry-overs from having seen some of the stars of the cast of Cross Fire in other pictures in favorable roles. Robert Young, Robert Mitchum and Sam Levene are well-known and probably well-liked, whereas Monty is a relative newcomer to the movie audiences.

14. While only a "straw in the wind," the film is a step in the right direction and should not be discouraged because of theoretical objections. However, we cannot expect too much from a "single-shot" propaganda message. Anti-Semitism is a deep seated phenomenon. We cannot look for easy shifts in attitudes of anti-Semitism. While not dangerous it is doubtful whether more pictures like Cross Fire will help or hinder the cause of tolerance.

15. Some people felt that Monty would be regarded in his present characterization as a pretty "normal guy." There is a possibility that the film may be offensive to white Protestant Americans since by inference they are the prejudiced. The audience is not shown instances of widespread anti-Semitism, but only one man who is eliminated at the end. The crime is murder rather than anti-Semitism.

16. The film is judged by some people as having the ability to strengthen preexisting attitudes of members of an audience; that is to say, that tolerant people would feel more tolerant and intolerant people more intolerant after viewing the movie.

17. Some discussants felt that the film would provoke discussion among people and that this would be good because vocalization of prejudice may be helpful. Prejudiced people who are aware of their prejudices and express them are considered easier to deal with than individuals who are not aware of their prejudice.

18. The net effect of the picture might be considerably strengthened by the initiation of organized group discussion throughout the country, using Cross Fire as a stimulus.

19. Cross Fire does not challenge an individual's own system of values.

20. A question was raised as to why the picture of F. D. R. is seen hanging on the wall of the detective's office throughout the picture. Anti-F. D. R. movie-goers might immediately label the film as a "New Deal" propaganda piece.

#### Miscellaneous Points

21. Most people felt that the movie would be at least a moderate success from a box-office point of view. At least 13 of the group felt that the movie was better than average, although 3 people felt it was a poor movie. Judgments of the picture as a work of art ranged mostly from average to good although a few people characterized the picture as vulgar and cheap, "a vulgar, cheap, ambiguous movie with confused characters."

22. Audience reaction to the sneak preview in Yorkville ought not to be taken as solid evidence for the good effect of the picture. Some people felt that the rejection of the detective's act in shooting Monty - of which there was no sign in Yorkville - should be a criterion of good effect.

#### Suggested Methods of Evaluation

1. Have respondents write a description of each one of the crucial characters. It is expected that this would reveal how successful casting was. (Casting is regarded for this picture as more important than the plot).

2. In order to determine the effectiveness of this picture it would be necessary to administer attitude measurements to a typical audience before and after seeing the film.



3. Depth interviews with a relatively small sample of respondents are suggested in order to determine with whom and with what the audience identifies. In doing these well scattered depth interviews the hunches developed in this discussion might be used.

4. Instead of trying to measure the effect of a single movie, research influence ought to be brought to bear upon implementing the film. There was some disagreement on this point because examples were cited where even short presentations were shown to have changed attitudes.

5. Observations ought to be made of informal discussions in homes and public places among movie goers some time after showing the film. Delayed rather than immediate recall should be tested. Also formal group discussions might be organized.

6. One type of item which might be used in a "before and after" test is a list of crimes including the crime in this picture, in an effort to see if attitudes toward this particular crime change as a result of seeing the movie.

7. Because of the likelihood that there will be an avalanche of films dealing with anti-Semitism it is important to test this particular film as one of the first in the series.

8. There ought to be some study of the problem of whether it is better to tell people that Jews are good or that anti-Semites are bad.

9. In testing such a film it would be better to compare it with some other film rather than to seek an evaluation of this film alone on its merits. It is always better to ask "is something better or worse than something else."

10. Some people felt that the ultimate impact of the film would be decided more by informal discussions after its showing than by the actual

presentation. It was, therefore, suggested that the support of voluntary agencies ought to be enlisted for guiding discussions of Grass Fire into appropriate channels. It would be advantageous to have such discussions led by persons experienced in research of group discussion techniques so that guiding principles of using the film as a stimulus in discussion could be evolved.

11. Because of the potential unconscious effects of the movie, indirect ("projective") methods of testing were recommended. Such methods are designed so as to reveal an attitude even though the testee is not aware of his own feelings or has, at least, not verbalized them.

A P P E N D I X

SUMMARY OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE  
DISTRIBUTED AT SHOWING OF THE FILM "CROSS FIRE"

Question 1. From a purely commercial-entertainment (box-office) point of view, do you believe that the picture will be:

|                               |           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| A very great success          | 2         |
| Moderately successful         | 18        |
| Average box-office attraction | 10        |
| A flop                        | 1         |
| Don't know                    | 1         |
| (No answer)                   | 2         |
| Total                         | <u>34</u> |

Question 2a. Do you believe that the film will be offensive to "minority groups in the population?"

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| Yes         | 8         |
| No          | 20        |
| (No answer) | 4         |
| Don't know  | 2         |
| Total       | <u>34</u> |

Which groups are likely to be offended?

|                          |             |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Catholics                | 6           |
| Jews                     | 6           |
| Protestants              | 1           |
| Negroes                  | 1           |
| Conservatives            | 2           |
| Anti-Semitic Protestants | 1           |
| Soldiers and veterans    | 1           |
| Anti-Semites             | 1           |
| None                     | 1           |
| No answer                | 18          |
| Total                    | <u>38 *</u> |

\*The total exceeds thirty-four because some people gave more than one answer.

Question 2b. Do you believe that the film might be offensive to native white Protestants in some areas of the country?

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| Yes        | 16        |
| No         | 12        |
| Maybe      | 1         |
| Don't know | 2         |
| No answer  | 3         |
| Total      | <u>34</u> |

If Yes, why?

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| By implication all Protestants are put in the role of murderers | 2         |
| Punishment for race hate  | 2         |
| Country club reasons  | 1         |
| Exaggeration of Protestant hatred                               | 2         |
| One Protestant in film portrayed as "Judas"                     | 1         |
| Extreme attempt to stir up trouble about nothing                | 1         |
| General anti-Semitism   | 2         |
| Reveals own feelings  | 2         |
| Prejudiced Protestants will feel attacked                       | 1         |
| Objection to presentation of soldiers in bad light              | 1         |
| Film is propaganda  | 1         |
| Traditional Protestant anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism       | 1         |
| Protestant does not take militant stand against prejudice       | 1         |
| Total   | <u>18</u> |

One respondent - 2 answers  
"Maybe" response 1

Question 3. On the whole do you feel that the picture will:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Reduce prejudice                                     | 6  |
| Increase prejudice                                   | 7  |
| Have little or no effect on prejudice (Can't decide) | 16 |
|  | 7  |

Miscellaneous opinions on the question were:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Crystalize opposition to prejudice   | 1          |
| Don't know   | 1          |
| Increase or decrease prejudice depending on predisposition of the audience | 3          |
| "Increase prejudice among very very few"                                   | 1          |
| Total  | <u>42*</u> |

\*The total exceeds more than 34 because some people gave more than one answer.

Question 3a. (If reduce prejudice will its greatest effect be to?)

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| "Convert" the prejudiced                   | 1        |
| Make pro-tolerant persons redouble efforts | 4        |
| Enlist the neutral                         | 7        |
| (Can't decide)                             | 2        |
| Make Protestant persons remain so          | 1        |
| Correct some very mildly prejudiced        | <u>1</u> |
| Total                                      | 16       |

Question 3b. (If increase prejudice)

(1) "Is the danger of showing this film as it is so great that you believe it should not be shown at all?"

|                                     |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Danger so great should not be shown | 2        |
| Danger not so great                 | 6        |
| (Can't decide)                      | 3        |
| Can't decide - test should be made  | <u>1</u> |
| Total                               | 12       |

(2) "If the film were to have certain scenes changed but still maintain its essential structure, would you say that it could be shown without increasing prejudice?"

|            |          |
|------------|----------|
| Yes        | 6        |
| No         | 3        |
| No answer  | 0        |
| Don't know | <u>2</u> |
| Total      | 11       |

Question 3c. (If "no effect on prejudice") for which of these reasons do you feel the film will have no effect?

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| The propaganda message will probably not even be noticed | 1         |
| People will get the message but not accept it            | 13        |
| (Other . . . what?)                                      | <u>11</u> |
| Total  | 25        |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Reaction against Judas scene  | 1 |
| Dissociating self from message  | 1 |
| Picture too extreme; murderer is bad man but not representative of widespread feeling | 1 |
| Doesn't emphasize how prejudice developed   | 1 |
| Emotional elements blot out rational acceptance of message                            | 1 |
| Increase and reduction will cancel out  | 1 |
| Don't know  | 1 |
| Some will ignore message  | 1 |
| Sympathy will probably be on the wrong side or confused                               | 1 |
| Propaganda too overt  | 1 |
| Much motivation of man appears false  | 1 |

IDENTIFICATION WITH CHARACTERS IN "CROSS FIRE"

| <u>Characters</u>           | <u>*INDIVIDUAL</u><br>Rank order (intensity) of<br>identification |            |            |            | <u>**AUDIENCE</u><br>Rank order (intensity) of<br>identification |            |            |            |              |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|------------|------------|--|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                             | (Order of<br>Choice)  | <u>1st</u> | <u>2nd</u> | <u>3rd</u> | <u>Total</u>   | <u>1st</u> | <u>2nd</u> | <u>3rd</u> | <u>Total</u> |
| Sgt. Keeley (Mitchum)       |   | 10         | 10         | 3          | 23   | 2          | 13         | 6          | 21           |
| Montgomery (killer)         |   | 0          | 0          | 2          | 2  | 2          | 1          | 3          | 6            |
| Capt. Finley (Robert Young) |   | 14         | 9          | 2          | 25   | 19         | 2          | 3          | 24           |
| Mitchell (1st suspect)      |   | 1          | 5          | 7          | 13   | 2          | 3          | 6          | 11           |
| Leroy                       |   | 0          | 0          | 3          | 3  | 0          | 3          | 0          | 3            |
| Samuels (Jew)               |   | 2          | 2          | 2          | 6  | 0          | 1          | 0          | 1            |
| Mary (wife)                 |   | 0          | 0          | 2          | 2  | 0          | 2          | 2          | 4            |
| Ginny (Dance Hall Girl)     |   | 2          | 0          | 4          | 6  | 1          | 0          | 0          | 1            |
| Bowers (2nd murdered)       |   | 0          | 1          | 0          | 1  | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0            |

\*Shows how members of the discussion group personally identified with the characters in "Cross Fire."

\*\*Shows how the "experts" anticipate that members of a typical movie audience would identify with the characters in "Cross Fire."

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Courtesy Dore Schary Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.