

LETTER TO THE MOVIE-MAKERS

The Film Drama as a Social Force

ELLIOT E. COHEN

GENTLEMEN:
We see by the papers that Hollywood is to give us a cycle of movies on anti-Semitism. This is exciting news. At last we are to have the fabulous magic of the film, the influence of its stars on the millions, its infinite technical resources, marshalled against this insidious social threat.

Crossfire, the first serious film on the subject, with an outspoken message attacking anti-Semitism, has now appeared, and we are to have *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Focus*, a still-untitled film built around a Gerald L. K. Smith type of demagogue, and probably others.

We have seen *Crossfire*. The film is palpably sincere; its producer is to our knowledge both earnest and intelligent. Yet the film raises certain serious questions which prompt this letter.

It is proverbially ungracious to look a gift horse in the mouth. We hope that you will not be too impatient if serious people do just that. Please don't resent it—you've offered him as an entry in one of the most

A BOYHOOD as one of a Jewish storekeeping family in the Negro district of an Alabama town and some four decades of interest in Jewish life may account, in part, for the concern of the writer of this letter with the problem of prejudice. A writer and critic, ELLIOT E. COHEN has also been professionally engaged in public relations work, and he has a record of active participation in organized effort for the defense of civil liberties and the rights of minorities. He has had some firsthand experience with movie-makers and movie-making, and is a constant moviegoer. He was born in 1899, and is a graduate of Yale. He is editor of COMMENTARY. The views he expresses here, it should perhaps be mentioned, are his own, and do not necessarily coincide with the views of the American Jewish Committee, which sponsors this magazine.

serious races in history—the race of man's intelligence against that most subtle and perhaps most explosive of modern man's insanities—Jew-hatred.

LET'S take a serious look at *Crossfire*, offered by the producer as a path-breaking opening gun in Hollywood's crusade against this prejudice.

If a film is to reach the millions, it must be made attractive to the millions; therefore *Crossfire* is a murder melodrama, in which the master detective solves the crime. In the shadowy living room of a modern apartment we see a man beaten to death by one of two unrecognizable figures, both of whom flee. The dead man is Samuels, a Jew (Sam Levene). Earlier that evening, at a cocktail bar, he had become involved in conversation with a group of demobilized soldiers, and ended by inviting one of them, a depressed sensitive youngster (Mitch), to his apartment to hear some records. The detective (Captain Finlay: Robert Young) must find the murderer among the four soldiers. The first suspect is obviously Mitch, whose wallet is found, but suspicion finally centers on another of the four, Corporal Montgomery (Robert Ryan). Montgomery admits following Mitch to Samuels' apartment with Bowers, a buddy; we are shown a flashback of a drinking scene in which Montgomery insults Samuels as a slacker, a niggardly host, and with other insinuations just short of open Jew-baiting. The rest of the picture revolves around efforts to find and clear Mitch, and to expose Montgomery as the murderer. In this Finlay is aided by Sergeant Keeley (Robert Mitchum), who is a friend of Mitch. It is a crime that obviously has no rational motive, Captain Finlay tells Keeley, and Jew-hatred, as revealed by Mont-

gomery's recurrent anti-Semitic remarks, qualifies as the purely irrational missing factor.

When suspicion closes in on Montgomery, he kills his friend Bowers, the only eyewitness. But another friend, Leroy, a Tennesseean who has been the butt of Montgomery's bullying, is persuaded to cooperate in a ruse by which Montgomery is made to expose himself. (Leroy consents to trap Montgomery because he resents him, and because a five-minute speech by the detective convinces him of the menace of race-hatred. Hatred is an irrational force, says Finlay: that hatred which once fastened itself on Irish-Catholic immigrants now attaches itself to Jews, and might in the end even attack all "men with striped ties"; his own grandfather, an Irish-Catholic coal-miner, was beaten to death because he had come to the defense of the town priest.)

Trapped, Montgomery breaks from the room and runs up and down the street, cornered by police cars but refusing to surrender, until he is killed from the upstairs window by a shot from Captain Finlay's revolver.

WHAT could be better? Five or six times during a typical movie feature, which will be seen by millions of average Americans, the hitherto unmentionable subject of anti-Semitism is exposed to the light of day, condemned, and its menace explained by Robert Young and Robert Mitchum, two of America's best liked and respected movie personalities, speaking as Gentiles—Catholic and Protestant respectively; moreover, warning of anti-Semitism as a danger to Gentiles (and America as a whole) and not as a threat against Jews alone. And for those who miss the argument, there is the stark syllogism of the drama's action: An anti-Semite kills a Jew; he is killed by the law. A capital punishment for a capital crime—simple, swift, and unmistakable.

And so, understandably, many general and Jewish "defense" organizations, film critics, propagandists, advertising men, and plain citizens are enthusiastic. The pro-

ducer is commended as a pioneer in public education: if other film producers will only go and do likewise, at last we shall be making progress.

As an advertising expert says: "It is an axiom that the three laws of advertising are 1. repetition 2. repetition 3. repetition"; and if an endless repetition of the formula LSMFT has the whole world buying Lucky Strikes, may we not, by similarly pounding away on the wrongness of hating Jews, wear a new groove in the reflexes of American social behavior?

AND yet, gentlemen—one is not happy to report it—there are others, equally concerned with the problem and equally expert, who see the picture differently.

The picture has been seen by psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and others with substantial experience in research and action programs in the field of anti-Semitism and allied problems; and this writer has had the benefit of the views of a number of them.

Of these, many were favorably impressed by the movie as a movie. But even most of these were by no means confident of its power to reshape the attitudes (and behavior) of its audiences. A few thought that the picture would "do good everywhere"; it would definitely influence the public, or, at least, as one mental hygienist put it, "bringing prejudice to the surface and openly confronting it is healthier than continuing to leave it suppressed and hidden." But others saw a more complex effect: the already liberal would be pleased—they would have their beliefs confirmed; the more thoughtful and only slightly anti-Semitic might be pushed over the line into the liberal camp. But, they speculated, would the unthoughtful, average movie-goer, with his hodgepodge of accumulated conditionings about Jews—the Christ-killer stigma, the "alien" taint, the various social "exclusions," the cluster of traditional stereotypes (usurer, radical, parasite, wizard, etc.)—would *he* be influenced? And the *real* anti-Semite, the personality alerted to the "Jew-menace" in a serious way—was it likely that the film could hope

to persuade this crucial group of its error?

Some of the experts were definitely negative, and saw the picture as not merely not helpful, but potentially harmful, especially as respects the strongly anti-Semitic movie-goer. Trying to look at the film through his eyes, as they have learned to know him through their studies of his personality type and its motivations, these less sanguine individuals saw *Crossfire* this way:

Crossfire is no cops-and-robbers story: from the start it projects you into the involved and unhealthy atmosphere of the "hardboiled" detective thriller (Hammett-Chandler: Bogart-Alan Ladd), in which violence and intrigue have acquired a new, sadistic dimension. It is a milieu in which the characters are mostly not merely sinister, but depraved: fists crunch against skulls, and murder is only the final expression of a world of hostility, torture, betrayal, and cruelty. Vice is no longer a mere means of advancing the plot (for the characters: for the audience) but an end in itself. Perversities lie close to the surface. And as this film progresses, it is clear that because of the social framework in which it is cast, and because it consciously and recurrently touches real social issues (a half-dozen others besides anti-Semitism) it is bound to set reverberating group and class prejudices and loyalties not evoked by the ordinary crime film or Western. (*Crossfire*, says one observer, starts a hundred hares, emotionally speaking, though in the end it may snare none.)

Now, let us watch the film as it might unfold before that more consciously anti-Semitic section of the audience which we are particularly disturbed about—and especially that crucial group, the "unadjusted" veterans. They see a group of GI's—just demobilized, ordinary, white native Protestant, "our kind,"—a band of comrades with battle records, plagued by the unhappinesses and insecurities of that new, troubling No Man's Land between war and postwar. Time hangs on their hands. We see them playing cards, griping (Montgomery), drinking, unhappy about their wives (Mitch).

A stranger butts in at the bar—a soft, suave, prosperous-looking businessman-artist-Jew, and reads Mitch a soulful sermon explaining why the world is so upset: it's natural, everybody's emotions were focussed on one object (illustration: this peanut I hold in my hand); now the war is over (illustration: he pops the peanut into his mouth)—so, naturally, our emotions are on the loose. Now because there is no enemy left to hate, a man begins to hate himself.

A wise guy—knows all the answers. This Jew has a fast-looking babe with him (obviously Gentile). He makes up to Mitch and invites him to his room—what does he want of him? Two of the others follow—free liquor, why not? Montgomery is pretty lit, and works himself into a drunken, chip-on-his-shoulder argument with the Jew.

Now, Montgomery. A tough character, and a nasty streak in him, especially with a drink or two under his belt. But you're drawn to him. He's big, he catches your eye. His personality overshadows the others. A plain, husky fellow, not much education, visibly troubled, up against a world too smart for him, fighting shrewdly, stupidly, blindly against the "others" who hem him in—before his crime, after his crime. (For the millions near enough like him to identify with him, will Montgomery be the simple bully and villain the producer intended, assuming that was his intention? The chances are just as good that he will be taken as a kind of hero-victim—the movie equivalent of the Hemingway-Faulkner-Farrell male, hounded and struck down by a world he never made.)

So he gets drunk, and he roughs up this Jew-civilian, and kills him.

And then we see this slick detective (Robert Young, note: the high-society playboy of a score of romantic films) closing in on Montgomery.

Mitch, the first suspect, is in the meantime piddling around with imagined marital troubles pretty completely on a women's magazine level, a mild, moony kind of a softie, hardly a man, much less a murderer. And then there is Sergeant Keeley, smooth,

given to cynical moralizing, ambiguous for a soldier, who puts in with the law.

It is he and the police captain—plus a brought-in major—who get this other soldier, a weak, illiterate hillbilly who doesn't know what time it is, to break every tie of soldier loyalty—that bond of common sufferings, discriminations, heroisms real or imagined—not merely to give his friend up, like a stool pigeon, but to trap him to his doom like a Judas! And so they corner Montgomery in the street—and they don't give him a trial, they don't even give him a chance to tell his story—they let him run up and down like a rat, and shoot him like a rat.

What the hell kind of justice is that, a soldier, who fought for his country, just for roughing up some smart-aleck Jew, and when the soldier was blind drunk and on a tear? What kind of a country do you call this when. . . . It only goes to show. . . .

Can you be sure that the anti-Semites in the audience won't react this way?

ONE thing is sure: this film sets up no simple equation with one inevitable answer, but a complex set of equations with a number of possible conclusions. Some are obviously minus. It is a credit to the producer that he complicates his fable, you say—it's evidence of sincerity and intelligence. If Montgomery were a simple villain, he would be incredible, would not evoke sympathy or identification. But you make him human enough to catch the emotions, and you never let him explain himself or the hold of the anti-Semitic insanity on him. This man so obviously torn by inner turmoil—we know little of his past (and that irrelevant); and his mouth is stopped by a bullet (his story untold).

And the Jew—to your credit he is no pasteboard, Arrow-collar noble-innocent. But in the few minutes we see him he establishes himself complexly and ambiguously. As a matter of fact (if it was done intentionally, here is an audacious producer indeed!) he is, come alive, a composite of many of the anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew—soft-handed, flashily dressed, suave,

artistic, intellectual, moralizing, comfortably berthed in a cushy bachelor apartment during a war, with a bosomy Gentile mistress, self-assured, pushing in where he is not wanted. The audience never learns anything about him, either—except when his certificate of honorable discharge (he was no civilian, but wounded in Okinawa; and he is not really rich, we are *told*) is dragged in to help establish the propaganda point.

Anti-Semitism, and only in its most extreme form, is dramatically *exhibited*; its causes simply and implausibly *preached*: Anti-Semitism is a pure irrational hate floating in space, embodied whimsically in certain individuals, directed whimsically against certain targets—Irish-Catholics; Jews; possibly, next, folks from Tennessee; after that, why not "men with striped ties"? This is the picture's sociological wisdom about anti-Semitism.

A complex social situation is set up—demobilized soldiers, each frustrated and rebellious in some different, individual way, a muddled postwar world; and, then, the simple cowboy-and-Indian resolution—these "buddies" unite as a posse in the out-of-hand execution of one of their number by the sheriff.

Research has established that propaganda may have "boomerang" effects. It is such considerations as the above that lead some experts to argue that there is a chance that *Crossfire* may reinforce rather than abate the emotions that make for anti-Semitism—and in a most ticklish sector of the population.

One doesn't yell "Fire" in a crowded movie house, even if there is a fire. On the surface, it wouldn't seem to make sense to show a film in a lynch county in Mississippi exhibiting in all its gruesome horror the burning of a Negro, presented momentarily and as a stock figure and about whom we are told nothing as a person, interspersed with a few moral preachments against Negro hatred by a northern college-bred FBI operative, followed up by his pistoling of the local taxi-driver who headed the mob. Don't you risk something when you voice before millions the

old European cry (to our knowledge still unheard on these shores) "Kill the Jew!"—and show the scapegoat actually slaughtered?

One West Coast psychologist, with an extensive record of study of the inner mechanisms of race hatred, raises the question whether a series of films like *Crossfire* might not link up hidden emotions with open action (heretofore aborted in our society) and stimulate violence—especially if the Jew continues to be presented as the helpless, non-resistant, made-to-order victim.

It is fair to say that, to our knowledge, this expert's fear of such consequences seems to be shared by few. If one were to sum up available expert opinion, few anticipate any great damage—and just as few see any important constructive social good. Mostly, they say, "It may do some good" or "It may have no effect either way." Or, say a few, "It may do some harm," or, "It may do some good in some areas and some harm in others." And there is a third view: If experts see such different versions of the same film, with such different impacts, isn't the over-all audience effect likely to add to the irritation, the frustration, and the sense of inner conflict that for so many Americans surround (and feed) anti-Semitism?

If clarity cures, the sheer confusion set up by *Crossfire* may, at the least, complicate the cure.

BUT there is one thing upon which all experts agree. In all humility, they say, "Actually, we don't know what effect a dramatic film like *Crossfire* will have on group prejudice." They would claim to have some understanding of the causes of anti-Semitism, economically, socially, culturally, psychologically; somewhat less understanding of the effect of simple propaganda methods on mind and behavior; but on the host of problems raised by a dramatic film like *Crossfire*—there, on their own admission, they sail uncharted seas.

Anti-Semitism, gentlemen, is a tricky disease. At the moment, we know that the germs of this disease lie latent everywhere in this country, stimulating large masses to

relatively discreet discriminations and exclusions, stimulating others to more or less open hatred and scarce-hidden violences and aggressions. (Pre-war Germany seemed less infected.) But suddenly—and this is the great fear—the disease can flare epidemically—and tens of thousands cry "Kill the Jew"—while the other millions stand passively by. Six million Jews—not to speak of most of Europe itself—died of such an epidemic not so long ago.

It does you credit that you wish to help in the hunt for preventive serums and cures. But, gentlemen, if it were cancer, and, after years of research, the doctors were still puzzled, would you . . . out of sheer boy-scout good-will . . . flood the drug-stores with a medicinal concoction thrown hastily together by a few of the boys in the back room?

Anti-Semitism, we repeat, is a serious problem, and *Crossfire* raises serious questions about it. But, to paraphrase an old Jewish joke, if you raise a serious question, your audience is entitled to a serious answer.

IF WE are being serious—and, remember, we still have this whole cycle of serious films on anti-Semitism ahead of us—might it not be a good thing, before we go further, to have a sober look at some of the things we know about changing real human attitudes—and behavior—by propaganda?

In the first place, changing a man's prejudices is a different matter from making him buy a certain brand of cigarette. Researches provide some evidence that a simple, reiterated good-will message, even if inserted like a "commercial" in the midst of mass entertainment, won't do it. In addition, there is the fact that even LSMFT and Jack Benny must have in addition to the endless repetition of Sunday after Sunday, an attendant barrage of newspaper ads, radio spot announcements, billboards and the rest—it must have that "saturation" without which every advertising man tells us it is hopeless to expect to influence mass buying. If you need the endless barrage to set people to switching from Old Golds to Lucky Strikes, to substitute two simple words for two equally simple

words, where are you with the good-will messages of Captain Finlay?

Early counter-propaganda against anti-Semitism assumed that on the clean slate of the individual's mind someone had written a misstatement, or drawn a simple false picture (stereotype). "Jews dodge war service"; so merely substitute the statement "10 per cent more Jews served our country in World War II than any comparable group." They say Jews are black marketeers. Just cut in with a picture of the heroic Barney Ross.

But, alas, it is more difficult than that. It is not merely that anti-Semitism is an infinitely complex set of "facts," images, emotions, conditionings, reflexes, beliefs, behavior patterns—subtle, shifting, mutually contradictory—accumulated over a lifetime; and that so much of it lies, like an iceberg, hidden, unconscious, inarticulate, expressing itself only in distorted forms, out of the reach, not merely of the outsider, but of the individual himself.

Even more important is the fact that the Jew-hatred of the dangerous anti-Semite is not a casual bit of excess baggage, to be casually discarded. It is central to his personality. It is perhaps his most important defense in a harsh world, enabling him to operate in the midst of conflicting pressures and personal frustrations. To greater or less degree it protects him; and, needing it, he will fight to protect it.

The easy-going journalistic assumption that a mere *exposé* suffices to cure a social ill is naive or worse. As for advertising wisdom, what could LSMFT do, if it were a question, not of riding and channelizing cigarette buying, but of stopping the cigarette habit? We are beginning to understand the personality frustrations at the root of chronic alcoholism; how many *Lost Week-ends* would it take to make a dent in the consumption of alcohol on, say, the Hollywood lots?

A second fact. The capacity of the infected personality to *evade* the impact of propaganda is amazing. A research institute interviewed individuals on their reactions to a series of cartoons caricaturing the bigot, in

broad tabloid style. Perhaps we need not be surprised that many people simply failed to understand the cartoons at all. But an astonishing number of those who understood the message simply evaded, in any one of a multitude of ways, making any connection between the message and its application to themselves.

The murderer in *Crossfire* is given a paper on which an address is written; obsessed by fear of capture he misreads it into the address of the house in which he killed his buddy. Write as plainly as you will the address of the social ills that plague the anti-Semite, and see him return unerringly to the scene of his ancient crime—the Jewish image he slays daily.

THIRD, there is some indication that there is among Americans a growing negative reaction to propaganda—the "special interest" message in the sugar pill. Two wars and the ministrations of radio announcers have set up at least the beginnings of a definite consumers' resistance, especially in the field of ideas; people seem increasingly sophisticated as to sources, sceptical as to motives. (Paul F. Lazarsfeld's study of a recent Presidential campaign draws the conclusion that the whole concerted barrage of campaign propaganda played an insignificant role in changing the votes of those who had already made up their minds.) The Superman tolerance programs have evoked wide commendation among men of good will. But I know at least one 12-year-old Jewish boy, very much interested in prejudice, who doesn't think much of them. "Oh, they just do it because they get a lot of publicity; they expect people to say how wonderful they are; my friend Jimmy says, 'Who's paying for it?'" (Jimmy is Gentile.)

Fourth—and here, perhaps, we enter the realm of speculation. If we intend to place weight on the dramatic film for anti-prejudice messages, perhaps we should look a little more closely at the whole great American institution of "going-to-the-movies." The film, yes, but in its context—the mass attendance of our population, weekly, almost

religiously. *Almost* religiously? The sociologists have skimmed this extraordinary phenomenon, but the plain citizen can see a fact when it looms as high as a mountain—or a cathedral. Even if they try to throw you off by calling it a movie cathedral.

Once a week America goes to the movies to celebrate a kind of holiday of the natural man—to live in a world of dreams and myths, and of such strange forbidden things as violence, brawling, intrigue, murder, childhood fantasies, and curious loves. We sit and gaze with hungry absorption and our sons and daughters sit next to us, in a common congregation of, shall we say, adolescence.

There is a time and place for everything, says Ecclesiastes. If we introduced a strip-tease in an Episcopalian church, the parishioners wouldn't like it. Perhaps a sudden sermon about Jews might fall on deaf ears when we are waiting to see the guns drawn, the detective beaten up, the blood flowing. Do we pay our money to have someone tell us about *Jews*?—*Somebody* is putting something over. . . .

And here we face some key mysteries. Does your young son sitting in the neighborhood movies identify himself with the cops or with the murderers? Is our movie-going three hours of sheer dream in which we live the life of unregenerate nature, cleansing our bosom of much perilous evil, so that we emerge better armed for the life outside? Or is our behavior shaped imitatively by the fair and foul images we see; if so, by which, and how much? Is the whole moral *effect* of the drama perhaps a complex mixture of all these possibilities?

THE psychologists give us clues. Human beings have aggressions. These aggressions need expression. They can be expressed directly, indirectly, symbolically, orally, and/or in action—in good or harmful ways, socially speaking. Can these aggressions, deeply rooted in our society, be guided and redirected through art forms?

One hypothesis states that in a crime story we identify first with the criminal, participating in his evil-doing, exulting in

his freedom outside mores and conscience and law; and then when he gets his comeuppance, we exult that he, too, has to toe the mark like ourselves. For an hour we live the dual lives of hunter and hunted, of the social and the anti-social, of control and of instinct. From the tension, the interplay, and the final resolution of these two sides of our nature (so goes the hypothesis) we are given purgation, and sent out in the streets again relaxed, healthier, and more human. But there are other hypotheses.

Obviously, we need a lot of thinking here. For example, some psychiatrists warn us to avoid a too rational appeal. New, rational controls may only increase the dangerous pressures. Anti-Semitism may be an expression of the individual's resentment of the constriction of the big city industrial society in which he lives, deprived of outlets for his emotions. His parents check him; his teachers, his sergeant, his foreman, the traffic cop, the church, the law—everything and everybody checks him, holds him back. Perhaps the movies offer a harmless escape. Suppose that there, in those profane precincts, you confront him again with the law, preaching to him some more, checking him again. Is that the best way?

Do we know?

AS IT happens, the movies, since the day they began, have never accepted any responsibility to anything except the box-office.

Now, in 1947, film-makers for the first time are minded to make their medium a conscious social force, to lend their art to the purposes of enlightenment and progress. (Hopefully, without loss of profits, too—after all, novels of social significance are on the best-seller list.)

However, in order to accomplish his new high-minded aims, the movie-maker needs more than noble aspirations and a few resoundingly written messages; he needs a developed, mature art form, and it is just this that is lacking. For Hollywood, as far as art is concerned, is still in the nickelodeon business—at 60¢ per head—loges, 80¢.

As a matter of fact, the movies today are

further away from being art than they ever were; certainly, they are less an art than in the days of the silent film.

So we are back where we came in—but, we must say, in less than 90 minutes. You want to fight anti-Semitism, gentlemen—and more power to you—and you have in your hands the most powerful medium yet devised for the communication of art and enlightenment to a mass audience. Yet your ability to use it for the social ends you desire is still primitive. You have forgotten that, in a democratic society, if art is to influence people, it must, before anything else, be art. (Need we say that by art we do not mean the “arty,” but artistic means properly disposed for artistic ends, in terms of the particular work one has in hand?)

Now for art you need to respect yourself and you need to respect your audience—which, if you look at it with the eye of true democracy, is not the “common man” or the “masses,” but your brother.

There is no substitute, and there is no short-cut. You cannot fight anti-Semitism, or any other social evil, unless you uphold in your thinking and in your art the faith in the worth, the dignity of man, and that means the complexity and potentialities of man—every man. And that faith, and the sense of respect and responsibility that comes with it, must begin right in the studio.

You cannot free your brother’s spirit by half-baked “progressive” catchwords or pious indoctrinations—no matter how well-intentioned—slipped into routine catch-penny thrillers and romances, written down to “the morons.”

IF THE problems we’ve raised here have made your ventures against anti-Semitism appear ringed with hopeless difficulties, that was not our intention.

But this is no light adventure, to be lightly polished off in a couple of story conferences. That’s all we’ve been saying. If you’re in, you’re in for the duration—and the duration may be a matter of years.

Of course, we know that just as the seed-ground of anti-Semitism is mass frustration

growing out of economic and social inequality, so the final solution will come through political action. But political action, of the kind that will win the victory, is unthinkable without all the resources, responsibly used, of science, intelligence, and art to feed it and to foster it.

And in the concerted attack of the forces of art and science and education and religion that will finally beat down this thing, the dramatic film can play a great role.

But that’s all pretty general, and you are practical men. Let’s see what we can do in the way of immediate, practical suggestions:

1. Would it be tactless to say that you might, first of all, turn to the practitioners of thought and art themselves—I mean to *serious* writers, among them, hopefully, some with genuine social insight and more than superficial political understanding? The film drama is, I repeat, a work of art. Of course, you have writers, some of the most famous names on two continents. But you half-use writers, because you use them as tools. You pay the fiddler, so you call the tune. Maybe, after making sure you have the very best, you should let writers call the tune once in a while. After all, it is they whose lives are music.

In listening to propaganda experts and social scientists discuss *Crossfire*, I was impressed with the fact that much of their analysis turned on the internal relationships and fine adjustments of plot, character, dialogue, action, dramatic business, etc. These are problems of art. And in this side of the task, you need men whose life work is a struggle to bring the subtle and warring elements of knowledge and living experience into that harmony which is a living work of art, where all the various phases fall in, and maneuver, and march along to an inevitable conclusion, carrying along with it to that same inevitable conclusion the human being who reads or listens or looks.

For that two-way process of growing self-awareness (*no*, it is not I who do this foul thing, who hate my brother); and self-analysis (heaven, help me, it is I); and final act of purgation and self-understanding (Lord,

if it be thy will, I will try to do better—), for *that*, gentlemen, as I was saying, you need art.

2. At the same time, since you want your art to be responsible and effective in dealing with social problems, you need to know what you are fighting against and what you are fighting for. If you were doing a film on steel, you would build a steel mill that would make Elbert Gary purr. There is a huge accumulation of the results of research into race hatred by historians, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, etc. There is a fund of information about how the anti-Semitic personality works: the roots of his aberration, the mechanisms that motivate him, and the facts that might reinfluence him.

There are also men with clinical experience and skills in dealing with those suffering from emotional abnormalities. You wouldn't film a naval battle without a host of experts and technical advisors. The material on race hatred isn't as simple as ballistics and logistics, but you can find men who can make it available to you. You can get three such good men for the price of one starlet.

We are not, of course, suggesting that you let science blue-print your films. What experts can do is to guide you, and tell you when you are defeating your own aims. One such expert would have been enough to save the producer of *Crossfire* from the ambiguities and possible boomerang effects that mar his effort.

3. Use the scientific testing techniques and methods of the content analysts and communications experts, who have been developing the relatively new science that studies how public understanding and behavior attitudes are influenced. Use these experts and their skills to test the impact of previous films, to pre-test audience response to parts of your films or to the actors in the key roles, and to test the completed film with different groups, areas, types of audience.

Find out what the spectators thought before the film; then ask them what they think after they've seen it. We will not pretend that completely reliable methods for testing movie-audience response have already been developed. You will have to further adapt existing techniques—polls, questionnaires, and interview-testing already in use by research institutes, advertising agencies, radio producers, and magazines—to the requirements of that more complex medium, the film drama, and develop new techniques, in addition.

If you undertake this, you can make an important contribution beyond your immediate task; you will be furthering scientific knowledge about the incidence and nature of group hatred in our population, as well as the effects and influence of art and education on the personality—matters about which we need to know so much and actually know so little. This would be a contribution to American life of the first importance.

NATURALLY, we are going to run into the dilemma of art and/or manipulation. The American public is suspicious of manipulation, for all ends except those of "consumer goods" consumption, and that public has every right to be suspicious. It goes to the movies for entertainment, not for lectures or self-improvement. The hand of the expert laid on too heavily would frighten art away and with it entertainment. The expert is to be used only as a check, not as the driving power.

In the end it comes to this: if you want to give social insight to the millions, and so help build a more decent society, your films must have that conviction that alone carries conviction. And for that you need the utmost knowledge, sympathetic imagination and art that you can muster—nothing less.

Gentlemen, how about really *working* at it?

Sincerely yours,
ELLIOT E. COHEN

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