

## The Playbill: Its Director Defends Lines In 'Crossfire'

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

THIS department's profound admiration for "Crossfire," the stirring and significant melodrama at the Rivoli, was qualified only by a minor reservation in regard to a speech delivered near the end of the picture. Like a fault in a friend, it merely provided contrast to the excellence of the rest of the film without injuring one's respect for the whole. The speech was delivered by Robert Young, as a detective, to a rather mixed-up soldier named Leroy, in an attempt to explain to him why he must help to catch a killer who had committed murder out of sheer religious hatred. It seemed extraneous because, in The Playbill's opinion, it re-stated a message already made boldly and acutely clear by the action: namely, that such prejudice is a despicable and dangerous thing.

Distinguished director Edward Dmytryk has done as much as possible to make this scene look like a natural and fluent part of the action; and elsewhere in the film the staging played a large part in making "Crossfire" the triumph that it is. In a letter received here last week he has explained the reasons why he and the producer included the speech in the picture. In his own words, they are, in part, as follows:

### Dmytryk's Letter

I would like to explain our point of view (Dmytryk writes) on that part of the picture which you consider weak. The scene with Leroy was put in after long and careful consideration of all its aspects and long research into the attitudes and information or lack of information of the general American public. In this respect I would like to assure you that there was no intention of "talking down" to our audiences. None of us has ever considered our audiences as unintelligent. But it cannot be denied by any one who has followed public opinion polls that the people who make up our audiences are certainly uninformed. When a poll indicates that 60 per cent of the American public has never heard of the four freedoms, it is certainly time for us to be concerned with ways and means of informing the American people about such matters.

Our investigation into techniques for fighting racial prejudice indicated that it is not enough to show an anti-Semite as a bad person. It is absolutely essential that every anti-Semite statement he makes and attitude he presents be specifically answered; otherwise the public goes away with only a memory of these particular statements and attitudes, and it accepts them as facts. The only place where we could specifically bring them out into the open and answer them was in the scene with Leroy. As you no doubt gathered, Leroy takes the place of our audience, not a stupid but an uninformed person.

For purely dramatic reasons, it was necessary to prove racial prejudice is so dangerous that, in admittedly rare cases, one of which we were dealing with in our story, it could lead to murder.

### Favored by 90 Per Cent

As proof of our success in those respects I need only point to our preview results as indicated in the preview cards. In the first place, we got a far greater return of cards than any picture has ever gotten. Ninety per cent of these were completely in favor of the picture; only 4 per cent, most of these openly anti-Semitic, were against it. Specifically, these cards indicated that by long odds the favorite scene in the picture was the very scene to which you object—the scene with Leroy. Very truly yours,

EDWARD DMYTRYK.

### Schary Agrees With Him

Also commenting on this scene by letter last week was Dore Schary, RKO's executive vice-president in charge of production, who made observations similar to those of Dmytryk, including the information that preview audiences liked the Leroy scene best. Their explanations have been set forth here not as a subject for rebuttal but to present the other side of the story. Without changing its original point of view, The Playbill prefers to give the producer and director of so grand a film as "Crossfire" the last word on his record.

Otis L. Guernsey, "The Playbill: Its Director Defends Lines in 'Crossfire'." New York Herald Tribune, August 10, 1947.

Courtesy Dore Schary Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.