

Introduction

Discovering *Crossfire*: Texts and Contexts

This project grew out of my lifelong passion for novels and movies (especially crime fiction and film noir), a commitment to progressive politics past and present, and a critical moment of archival serendipity. As I was beginning my dissertation research, I took a trip to the State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin. At that point, I had a rather vague notion that I would write on the process of adapting novels to film. Though I had decided already, as a way of narrowing the field, to focus on crime fiction that became film noir, my list of prospects was still impossibly long, and I hoped that archival research might help me narrow the topic further. So I went to Madison on a fishing expedition, and in the papers of filmmaker Dore Schary, I reeled in a whopper. 1

Schary was a liberal Jew with a history of progressive activism and a reputation for making "message pictures." Upon taking over as RKO's vice president in charge of production in early 1947, one of the first movies Schary greenlighted was *Crossfire*—a film noir about the murder of a Jew by a bigoted ex-GI. It was adapted from one of the more obscure novels on my list: *The Brick Foxhole* by Richard Brooks, in which the murder victim was a gay man. That seemed promising for a study of the adaptation process, and I was intrigued by the cultural politics. I began to madly photocopy material from the Dore Schary archive: correspondence between Schary and the film's producer, Adrian Scott; budgets and minutes from production meetings; a copy of the shooting script by screenwriter John Paxton; results of sneak previews for theater audiences as well as special screenings for Jewish defense organizations; critical reviews and fan letters from friends in the industry as well as the general public; a blistering exchange of letters and articles between Schary and Elliot Cohen, editor of *Commentary*; a mountain of press clips, correspondence, and legal documents concerning the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings on subversion in Hollywood, which resulted in contempt citations for the now infamous Hollywood Ten—a group that included producer Adrian Scott as well as Edward Dmytryk, *Crossfire*'s director; Schary's deposition in Scott's lawsuit against RKO for wrongful termination; and more. As literally hundreds of pages rolled out of the copier, I realized I could throw away my list. I had found my story. 2

I rushed home to take another look at the film on video. Set in Washington, D.C., just after the end of the Second World War, *Crossfire* is a classic Hollywood manhunt thriller in which an innocent and troubled soldier is implicated in a disturbing murder—the ubiquitous frame-up that forms the existential backdrop to 3

so many archetypal film noirs. *Crossfire* has all the visual hallmarks of the best of 1940s noir: innovative camera angles, high-contrast lighting, a series of disorienting flashbacks. It has a stellar cast: Robert Young as the world-weary police detective who realizes that intolerance was the cause of the murder that seemed without motive; Gloria Grahame as the tough-but-tender B-girl who provides the critical alibi for the innocent (but potentially adulterous) soldier; Robert Mitchum as the street-smart soldier who rallies the band of brothers to vindicate their fellow GI; Sam Levene as the kindly Jewish murder victim; and Robert Ryan in a chilling tour-de-force as the insinuating and bullying anti-Semite. *Crossfire* has moments of pedantry, but overall it is a compelling, exciting film. It came as no surprise to me to learn that *Crossfire* was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actor and Actress for Ryan and Grahame, respectively.

Next, I plunged into Richard Brooks's *The Brick Foxhole*—a disjointed, chaotic, even sordid novel, horrifically overwritten in places, stunningly insightful in others. Several critical stream-of-consciousness passages read like something from John Dos Passos's proletarian-modernist epic, the *U.S.A.* trilogy; the hypermasculinity, latent homosexuality, and disturbing gender relations reek of Hemingway; one chillingly banal conversation between a pair of drunken businessmen might have been plagiarized from Sinclair Lewis's antifascist expose *It Can't Happen Here*. Though the novel's murder victim is a homosexual rather than a Jew, the theme of anti-Semitism runs throughout the text and is a central element in Brooks's unflinching indictment of intolerance and racism of all kinds. I immediately understood what producer Adrian Scott saw in *The Brick Foxhole* and why he had chosen it as the literary source for his long-contemplated cinematic exposé of anti-Semitism and the American potential for fascism.

As I forged delightedly ahead, I found that *Crossfire* occupies an interesting position within the canon of classic Hollywood films. While rating a mention and sometimes an extended discussion in nearly every major analysis of film noir, *Crossfire* has faded in the popular memory, surpassed by such quintessential noir works as *Double Indemnity*, *The Killers*, *Out of the Past*, *Touch of Evil*, or even *Murder, My Sweet*, the first film by the creative trio that made *Crossfire*. Similarly, as a social problem film about anti-Semitism, *Crossfire* has been largely overshadowed by *Gentleman's Agreement*.¹ Released only months after *Crossfire*, *Gentleman's Agreement* won many of the Oscars for which *Crossfire* had been nominated, including Best Director for Elia Kazan and Best Picture of 1947.²

Nevertheless, *Crossfire* has enjoyed an unusually wide circulation in the world of academic film criticism. Because it straddles the genres of film noir and the social problem film, *Crossfire* is frequently analyzed in terms of film genre and narrative

conventions, or within the context of changing cinematic representations of ethnicity and Jewishness. In some ways, the film's reputation may have suffered from the difficulties critics have had in categorizing it. For example, several critics have suggested that *Crossfire's* status as a film noir is compromised by the unfortunate and awkward insertion of the social message. Other critics question its effectiveness as a social problem film, suggesting that its focus on the "radical fringe" of anti-Semitism is less socially significant than the mainstream representation of "genteel" anti-Semitism in *Gentleman's Agreement*. In comparison to the cheerful, liberal faith of *Gentleman's Agreement* that education will solve the problem of anti-Semitism, *Crossfire's* representation of explosive violence and latent homosexuality combined with its link between anti-Semitism and native fascism seems too dark and complicated. Ironically, perhaps, *Crossfire's* representation of the deadly consequences of anti-Semitism—as important as its visual style to its inclusion in the film noir canon—becomes the grounds for its dismissal as a flawed social problem film.³

The political issues surrounding the production and reception of *Crossfire* have also served to bring the film to the attention of critics. In this interpretive mode, analyses of *Crossfire* have focused on the struggle to bring the subject of anti-Semitism to the screen within the confines of the studio system. Alternatively, several studies emphasize the acrimonious debate among Jewish organizations over the political uses of *Crossfire*.⁴ Revisionist interpretations of the Old Left in general and Hollywood radicalism in particular have helped to recuperate *Crossfire* as a "film made by radicals." This has shifted the interpretive focus away from strict considerations of genre and narrative toward greater consideration of the film's historical and political context. In these more nuanced works, *Crossfire* is read against the political commitments and activities of Hollywood progressives as well as the impact of the Cold War, the HUAC hearings, and other major shifts in political, social, and economic history. In this context, *Crossfire* is seen as a key example of the negotiation between creative workers, the studio system, and the censorship apparatus, and as part of the ongoing struggle by Hollywood radicals to inject progressive content into mainstream Hollywood films.⁵

Numerous scholars have noted that working within the studio system, with its hierarchical power structure and tendency to prioritize profits and entertainment over art or social content, presented significant challenges for Hollywood radicals. While the film radicals recognized the political and creative limitations of Hollywood's mass production system, they still struggled to shift the balance of power, however slightly. From the campaign to unionize the film industry to the daily "shop floor" attempts to shape the aesthetic and political content of movies, they resisted the strictures and indignities of the studio system. Thus, as film

7

8

historian Thomas Schatz notes, "[S]tudio filmmaking was less a process of collaboration than of negotiation and struggle—occasionally approaching armed conflict."⁶

This story of negotiation and struggle is at the heart of my analysis of the Hollywood career of Adrian Scott. A key figure in the circle of young progressive filmmakers working at RKO during the 1940s, Scott worked as a screenwriter before being promoted to contract producer in 1943. As a "salaried underpaid producer," Scott occupied a rather different niche in the Hollywood hierarchy than such independent producers as David O. Selznick and Walter Wanger or powerful studio production heads as Twentieth Century–Fox's Darryl F. Zanuck.⁷ I argue, however, that Scott's status in the studio system is less significant than the synergy between his creative work and his progressive political commitments. A member of the Screen Writer's Guild, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and other progressive groups, as well as the Communist Party, Scott was in many ways the quintessential Popular Front Communist: committed to the tripartite agenda of antifascism, antiracism, and progressive unionism, but inspired less by Marxism than by the American tradition of radical democracy.⁸ Screenwriter John Paxton, his friend and longtime collaborator, saw the wellspring of Scott's radicalism as his "compassion and great intolerance for any injustice or evil that transcended any kind of ideology."⁹ Scott's creative work and commitment to the Popular Front agenda were inextricably intertwined; like many in this younger generation of filmmakers, Scott believed movies were both an art form and a powerful ideological tool.¹⁰ With his muckraking faith in the power of film to raise public consciousness, Scott understood filmmaking as not only his job, but his primary mode of political activism.¹¹

Early in his Hollywood career, Scott had realized that in order to translate his political and artistic vision into film he would need greater autonomy and control over the filmmaking process than was ordinarily granted to screenwriters. Though many of his writing peers sought greater creative control as directors, Scott understood that it was the producer, with a foot in both the creative and the business sides of the industry, who held the ultimate power over film product. As a producer, Scott had significant input into the key elements of the production process, including the budget, the script, and the choice of writers, directors, and cast. Scott's production unit at RKO soon established a reputation for low-budget melodramas that combined noir stylistics and social justice themes to produce box-office magic. Screenwriter John Paxton and director Edward Dmytryk formed the backbone of Scott's unit, working with him on four extremely successful films—*Murder, My Sweet*; *Cornered*; *So Well Remembered*; and *Crossfire*—between 1944 and 1947. The breakaway success of *Murder, My Sweet* made Scott the hottest producer on the RKO lot, and one friend remembered that,

9

10

by the war's end, he was hailed as "the new boy wonder, 'the new Thalberg.'"¹²

This comparison with MGM wunderkind Irving Thalberg is intriguing. At first glance Scott, a middle-class Irish Catholic who followed his literary aspirations from Amherst College to Broadway to Hollywood, seems to have had little in common with Thalberg, a German Jew who chose business over college and climbed the ranks, from secretary to general manager at Universal, to vice president at MGM, by his early twenties. Nonetheless, though Scott never achieved the power or mystique of Thalberg, he too was seen as something of a young genius during his tenure at RKO, a man of great talent and taste, with a knack for selecting just the right literary property, cast, and crew to produce films that appealed to both critics and audiences. And, though Scott was certainly ambitious, he, like Thalberg, stood out for his quiet integrity and lack of affectation in an industry notorious for overblown egos, self-aggrandizement, and pretension.¹³ In producing Scott found his *métier*, but he also quickly learned that, in many ways, producing simply raised the stakes in the complex process of negotiation within the studio system.

11

In focusing on the Hollywood career of Adrian Scott, and particularly on the controversial production and reception of *Crossfire*, I address a number of issues and questions in film history. First, challenging the auteurist tendency to privilege the role of the director in film production, I reassess the role of the producer in the Hollywood studio system and argue that Adrian Scott, not Edward Dmytryk, was the creative and political visionary behind *Murder, My Sweet*; *Cornered*; and *Crossfire*.¹⁴ John Paxton, the third member of the creative trio behind these films, supports this thesis, noting that after Scott was blacklisted, "neither Dmytryk nor I were ever again involved in films of this particular sort."¹⁵ Significantly, Scott himself would have disdained the elitist assumptions embedded in the notion of an auteur. For Scott, film was a collaborative art, and he worked hard to make his production unit a creative team that valued the contributions of all. Paxton thought Scott was a brilliant producer with an unerring gift for "concepts and constructions," and he credited him with many of the key plot points and stylistic innovations in his screenplays, from the flashback sequence in *Murder, My Sweet* to the "right-house-but-the-wrong-address" ploy in the denouement of *Crossfire*.¹⁶ Though Scott did not take screen credit for his script contributions, he worked closely with his screenwriters and saw his role as inspiring rather than harassing, frustrating, or intimidating them. For Scott, this collaborative approach was part of his larger political commitment to challenging hierarchies, whether within the studio system or within American society as a whole.

12

Second, I use Scott's Hollywood career to examine the political and creative challenges faced by radicals working in the studio system. In this context, I argue

13

that the political and cultural significance of *Crossfire*—and perhaps of any Hollywood film—cannot be fully understood without close attention to the adaptation and production process itself. Indeed, film historians Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund specifically call for studies that document this process, noting that the "finished film alone cannot provide evidence of how much the producers changed, or how much they did not have to change as a result of the success of the studio conditioning process on left-wing screenwriters."¹⁷ Reconstructing the backstory of Scott's work in the 1940s, his interactions with studio heads and the Breen Office as he maneuvered his films through the production process, offers a much more nuanced picture of the strategies of accommodation and resistance employed by radicals working within the studio system. This was particularly relevant during the 1940s, when the wartime demands for greater realism from Hollywood films pushed the limits of the Production Code and created new opportunities for political filmmaking in the postwar period. Scott's work during this period suggests his growing political engagement and ever-bolder attempts to subvert the studio system, beginning with the critique of class and corruption in *Murder, My Sweet*, through the internationalist antifascism of *Cornered*, to *Crossfire*, the final point on the trajectory of Scott's attempts to meld his creative and political visions.

Third, I use these three films to explore the relationship between antifascist politics and film noir. Certainly it is important to recognize that "film noir" is a term applied after the fact: nobody in 1940s Hollywood consciously set out to make a "film noir"; instead, they saw themselves as making melodramas or thrillers, and the distinct visual style so associated with noir was often a creative response to the wartime blackouts, shortages of film stock and matériel for sets, and the like.¹⁸ Nevertheless, I argue that the narrative strategies and visual style of film noir represented the cutting edge of radicals' resistance to the representational boundaries of mainstream Hollywood films. Early noirs like *Double Indemnity* and *Murder, My Sweet*, with their exploration of such adult themes as adultery, murder, and the dark side of human nature, seemed to transfer the realism of wartime films from the foxholes to the home front. Film noir's roots in pulp fiction, its exploration of existential themes, of the seamy underbelly of American society, and of the corruption of the monied classes not only pushed the envelope of the Production Code, but also reflected the political ethos of the Popular Front generation. It is no accident that many of the pioneers of film noir were also closely associated with progressive politics. Between the end of the war and the onset of the blacklist, a handful of progressive Hollywood filmmakers tried to meld the emerging noir style with overt political content, especially concerning fascism and antifascism. Adrian Scott was on the cutting edge of this trend and, I would argue, led the way in integrating his antifascist politics with his creative work. Read against his earlier films—both the pioneering

noir *Murder, My Sweet* and the antifascist thriller *Cornered*—*Crossfire* emerges, not simply as a "political" film noir or an anti–anti-Semitism message film, but as a specifically *antifascist* film.

Finally, I contend that *Crossfire's* stormy public reception—by audiences, film critics, Jewish defense organizations, and ultimately the House Un-American Activities Committee—reveals the widespread recognition in the postwar period that Hollywood films, far from being mere entertainment as the studio moguls insisted, were a powerful tool in shaping public consciousness. Indeed, Hollywood films played a critical role in mediating the cultural tensions exacerbated by the Depression, the Second World War, and the emerging Cold War. During the 1930s and 1940s, moviegoing was the national pastime, and movies were the wellspring of the national imagination. As Lary May argues, "The movies were perhaps the most powerful national institution which offered private [cultural] solutions to public [political] issues."¹⁹ By mid-century, then, few cultural institutions could challenge the power and hegemony of Hollywood in the invention of "imagined communities."²⁰

15

Thus, I believe that *Crossfire* demands a wider interpretive net than has been cast by film historians and cultural critics, and that the career of Adrian Scott and his films of the 1940s raise questions and issues of significance for the larger field of modern American history. I argue that *Crossfire* must be seen as an intervention in the complex and often contradictory construction of an imagined community of Americans that dominated much of the twentieth century, a discourse of belonging and exclusion, of identity and difference, of "us" and "them." As a Popular Front Communist, Scott's political vision was indelibly shaped by the American encounter with European fascism in the 1930s and 1940s. For him, anti-Semitism or any form of racism was decidedly un-American, a repudiation of the liberal promise that "all men are created equal." Moreover, in the wake of the Nazi campaign against the Jews and the revelation of the Holocaust, the rising evidence of anti-Semitism in the United States seemed particularly menacing. Dramatizing Scott's belief that anti-Semitism was a symptom of fascism, *Crossfire* represents both a powerful warning of the potentially violent consequences of racism and an alternative Americanism that calls upon the United States to live up to its democratic promise, particularly on issues of race. Ultimately, then, my analysis of *Crossfire* and the career of Adrian Scott suggests that the mid-century discourse on Americanism cannot be fully understood without reference to antifascism and anti-Communism, both as ideologies and as political movements.

16

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the discourse on Americanism underwent profound changes, from the scientific racism that informed the early eugenic and nativist movements to an embrace of cultural pluralism and universalist tolerance

17

during the war years. Many factors—social, political, economic, and cultural—fueled this transformation, but one of the most critical was the rise of European fascism.²¹ Though certainly some saw fascism as an admirable social experiment and even a bulwark against Communism,²² for most Americans by the late 1930s, fascism represented the ideological Other against which they understood and self-consciously constructed their own political culture and imagined community, "their" Americanism. The Popular Front, an antifascist alliance of radicals and liberals, was particularly strong in Hollywood; indeed, the war, in encouraging "political" filmmaking, offered Hollywood progressives new opportunities to integrate their artistic vision with their antifascist, antiracist politics, significantly shaping wartime constructions of Americanism. The popular nationalism elaborated during the 1940s represented the Second World War as a struggle between the "free world" and the "slave world," juxtaposing the democratic idealism and tolerance of the Allies against the barbarism and racism of the Axis enemy.²³

By the 1940s, the Nazi ideology of Aryan superiority and its campaign against the Jews had led to a troubled reappraisal of the very basis of scientific racism and fueled a reorientation of American attitudes toward the place of race in a liberal democracy. One key strategy in this reorientation (with particular significance for *Crossfire*) was to bring Jews and other "provisional" whites into the Caucasian fold under the new rubric of ethnicity. This is not to say that race ceased to be an issue in the United States. On the contrary, the new taxonomy merely shifted the terms of the debate, producing a bifurcated system that defined race largely in terms of black versus white.²⁴ Nonetheless, by the end of World War Two, an amorphous cultural pluralism had become the primary paradigm through which Americans reconciled the powerful homogenizing tendencies of industrial capitalism and mass society with the desire to preserve heterogeneity and individuality. Most importantly, cultural pluralism during the 1940s was linked very specifically to nationalism as a key means of articulating the differences between Americanism and fascism. Thus, by the end of World War Two, "Americans All" replaced "America for the Americans" as the rallying cry of popular nationalism.²⁵

Though Americans eagerly embraced the postwar "return to normalcy," the experience of the war itself had provoked a profound existential crisis. The vast carnage alone—sixty million people dead, including six million Jewish victims of the Nazis' Final Solution and hundreds of thousands of Japanese victims of the atomic devastation unleashed by the Americans themselves—radically challenged the modernist faith in such fundamental concepts as "progress," "civilization," and, indeed, "normalcy," and paved the way for postmodernism. Historian William S. Graebner suggests that the pervading ironies and contingencies of the 1940s

18

19

fueled a profound crisis in American national identity in the postwar period:

Was the United States a bastion of isolationism, as it had been in 1940, or a committed imperial power, as the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan seemed to demonstrate? Was the nation committed to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal welfare state—with its implied goal of economic security for all citizens—or was it, as the popularity of Ayn Rand's novels suggested, a stronghold of free-enterprise capitalism and individual responsibility, given to entrepreneurship and risk taking? Were Americans the stable, rooted beings that appeared in Norman Rockwell's paintings, or were they, as Oscar Handlin's study of immigration claimed, "the uprooted"?²⁶

In many ways, the year 1947 marks a unique cultural moment in American history, a pivotal point at which the trajectory and shape of the postwar world were in transition, and competing visions of Americanism vied for hegemony.²⁷ Two wartime articulations—Henry Luce's "American Century" and Henry Wallace's "Century of the Common Man"—set the terms of the debate. In 1941, publishing magnate Luce argued that the United States must reject isolationism and enter the war in order to position the nation for postwar dominance—political, economic, and ideological. For Luce, the exportation of the American values of free enterprise and democracy would produce material abundance and security for the entire world. In 1942, then—Vice President Wallace offered his alternative to Luce's rather imperialist vision, calling for the worldwide extension of the New Deal and the redistribution of economic resources to "humanize" capitalism. Though Wallace's vision became a rallying point for the postwar left-liberal Popular Front, his "common man" was less a proletarian hero than a version of the "average American" constructed by advertisers and social scientists, and Wallace certainly shared Luce's faith in the relationship between abundance and freedom. Nonetheless, Wallace's call for international cooperation—particularly with the Soviet Union—set him fundamentally at odds with Luce, who even in 1941 predicted that the divisions between the "free world" and the "slave world" would continue into the postwar period.²⁸

20

In this context, the lingering specter of fascism was critically important. In the postwar period, fascism was equated with Communism under the rubric of "totalitarianism." Despite their very different ideological roots, the parallels between the political repression and militarist aggression of Nazism and Stalinism seemed unmistakable and ominous, and throughout the Cold War, fascism provided for many thinkers a template for understanding and even predicting the behavior of the Soviet Union. The American horror of Communism, submerged during the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, reemerged even before the war's end; as denazification brought "good Germans" back into the democratic fold, American fears of fascism were projected onto Communism. Joseph Stalin,

21

viewed as the friendly "Uncle Joe" during the war years, quickly reverted to an iron-willed dictator, Hitler's evil twin, and the freedom-loving Russian people who had been glorified in wartime propaganda were again seen as either duped automatons or wild-eyed revolutionaries. For most Americans, Communism, like fascism, was perceived as a profound threat to the American Way of Life, and the wartime antifascist impulse translated only too easily into the postwar anti-Communist crusade.²⁹

For American radicals, the fascist model also had great explanatory power in the postwar period. However, rejecting the explanatory lens of totalitarianism, with its tendency to blur distinctions between facism and Communism, they continued to see fascism as the primary ideological threat to democracy. For them, the danger was that the United States would fall prey to fascism, rather than Communism. Recalling the fascist use of anti-Communist rhetoric to crush labor and the left and to consolidate reactionary political power in Italy and Germany, they interpreted the postwar anti-Communist crusade as a harbinger of fascism in America. In 1947, ominous portents, mirroring the dislocations that had fueled European fascism after the First World War, were everywhere: fears of rising inflation and a return of economic depression, concerns about the reintegration of war veterans, rising anti-Semitism and racism, and a flurry of antilabor legislation. All were signs suggesting, to the radicals, that America was on the road to fascism.

22

These fears were confirmed by the attack on Hollywood by the House Un-American Activities Committee in the fall of 1947. In a nation only too aware of the uses the Nazis had made of mass culture to win the hearts and minds of ordinary Germans, the charges of Communist influence in Hollywood provoked alarm and dismay on both the right and left, though for very different reasons. During the war years, "freedom of the screen" was touted as one of the fundamental differences between democracy and fascism; thus, in the contest between HUAC and Hollywood, each side proclaimed the other un-American. For the conservatives, the evidence of Marxist propaganda in Hollywood films proved that an international conspiracy of Hollywood Jews and Communists was undermining American cultural values and democratic traditions. For the Hollywood radicals, the HUAC investigation was a harbinger of fascism in America, the opening salvo in a far-reaching reactionary plan to undermine fundamental American freedoms.

23

Indeed, to a certain extent, both sides were right. Hollywood radicals *did* try, within the confines of the profoundly conservative studio system, to produce antifascist, antiracist, internationalist, progressive films. And the HUAC members, recognizing the power of film to shape public consciousness and to reflect the

24

nation to the world, *did* want to ensure that Hollywood films reflected their own conservative version of Americanism. In this context, it is not surprising that Adrian Scott and Edward Dmytryk were among the nineteen "unfriendlylies" subpoenaed by HUAC in 1947. Scott and, at least at the time, Dmytryk advocated an alternative Americanism that called upon the nation—both its leaders and "the people"—to live up to the radical democratic ideals embodied by Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and even Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Though Scott and his radical cohort eagerly participated in the construction of the wartime popular nationalism, they also recognized the slippage between rhetoric and reality and condemned liberalism's collaboration with class and racial oppression in the United States. For Scott, socialism represented the fulfillment of those particularly American ideals; for him, Communism was, indeed, "Twentieth Century Americanism," as the Popular Front slogan proclaimed. He believed that socialism would—and must—come to America, not through armed, bloody revolution but through popular participation in representational government and the constant expansion of the state. For Scott the idealist, the state represented the will of the people, or at least it should; and for him, Roosevelt's New Deal was proof that, in fact, it could. Scott may have been a Communist, but he had great faith in the power of the liberal state to transform the lives of ordinary citizens. In the postwar period, as a member of Progressive Citizens of America and a supporter of Henry Wallace, Scott advocated an expansion of the New Deal at home and internationalist cooperation abroad. As a filmmaker, he attempted to infuse his work with this antiracist, antifascist, internationalist vision. Thus, *Crossfire*, the pinnacle of his political and creative achievement, was a very dangerous film in the eyes of HUAC, and Scott and Dmytryk were caught in the crossfire of the postwar struggle to identify and contain Americanism and un-Americanism.

In the struggle between HUAC and Hollywood, the older, xenophobic, antiradical, antimodernist tradition of Americanism was pitted against a new Americanism, the more cosmopolitan, modernist, and pluralist popular nationalism of the war years that was broadly shared—and indeed, largely articulated—by the studio moguls, the liberal activists, and the radical dissidents in Hollywood. The debate over the Hollywood Ten, however, quickly revealed the fissures within this new Americanism, as the Popular Front vision of the increasingly isolated leftists was overwhelmed by the increasingly hegemonic "American Century" anti-Communism of Hollywood liberals. Though this conflict often played itself out as an internal industry struggle, in many ways it reflected a larger struggle over the meanings and uses of Americanism within the culture as a whole.

Weaving together industrial practices, cultural texts, and changing historical contexts, this study attempts to locate and understand the significance of

25

26

Crossfire to the construction of Americanism at this critical cultural moment. Chapter 1, "Reel Reds, Real Americans: Politics and Culture in the Studio System," paints a sweeping portrait of Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s, examining the political and cultural negotiations between Hollywood progressives and the studio executives, the culture of the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA) and the Popular Front in Hollywood, and the early careers of Scott, Paxton, and Dmytryk. Chapter 2, "Raising the Cry of Alarm: Popular Nationalism, World War Two, and the New Political Filmmaking," explores the popular discourse on fascism and antifascism, nationalism, nativism, and anti-Semitism from the 1930s through the end of World War Two, emphasizing Hollywood's role in the construction of a wartime popular nationalism. Chapter 3, "The Progressive Producer in the Studio System: Film Noir and the Production of *Murder, My Sweet*," examines Scott's promotion from screenwriter to producer and his first collaboration with Paxton and Dmytryk on the film noir classic *Murder, My Sweet*. Chapter 4, "They Must Not Escape: *Cornered* and the Specter of Postwar Fascism," examines significant transformations in the immediate postwar period; it focuses on national and international political developments, particularly ongoing concerns about fascism, as well as heightened expectations of the possibilities for postwar political filmmaking, through an analysis of the 1945 Scott-Paxton-Dmytryk film *Cornered*. Chapter 5, "You Can't Do That: From *The Brick Foxhole* to *Crossfire*," reads Richard Brooks's novel *The Brick Foxhole* as an antifascist counternarrative that challenged key tenets of wartime popular nationalism, paying particular attention to representations of masculinity and Jewishness; this chapter also examines Scott's early efforts to shepherd *The Brick Foxhole* through the studio system. Chapter 6, "It *Can* Happen Here: Noir Style and the Politics of Antifascism in *Crossfire*," examines the adaptation and production of *Crossfire* as a case study of political filmmaking within the studio system, reading the screenplay in the context of the novel, exploring the significance of changes within the various versions of the screenplay, and finally reading the film itself as a distinct cultural product. Chapter 7, "Is It Good for the Jews? The Jewish Response to *Crossfire*," examines the heated debate between the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee over the social uses and political meanings of *Crossfire* for American Jews. Chapter 8, "Hate Is Like a Loaded Gun: Shaping the Public Response to *Crossfire*," examines the popular and critical response to *Crossfire*, as well as the studio's attempts to shape the public reception of the film first through a complex program of previews and audience testing, and then through specific publicity and advertising strategies. Chapter 9, "Americanism on Trial: HUAC, the Hollywood Ten, and the Politics of Anti-Communism," examines the postwar negotiation of Americanism engendered by the 1947 HUAC investigation of subversion in the film industry and the subsequent blacklisting of the Hollywood Ten. This chapter focuses particularly on the political uses of "radical" and "Jew" and the juxtaposition of

fascism and Communism within the Cold War discourse on Americanism and un-Americanism. Chapter 10, "The Triumph of Anti-Communist Americanism: The Blacklist and Beyond," focuses on the post-HUAC fortunes of Adrian Scott, Edward Dmytryk, and Dore Schary in order to examine the impact of the blacklist on Hollywood films and filmmakers and on the Popular Front in the postwar period. The conclusion, "Freedom of the Screen? The Politics of Postwar Cultural Production," comments briefly on the impact of the blacklist on film content and Cold War American culture.

Notes

Note 1: A recent example of the historical overshadowing of *Crossfire* is the March 1999 National Public Radio story on the controversy over Elia Kazan's Lifetime Achievement Oscar, which identified *Gentleman's Agreement* as the first Hollywood film to deal with anti-Semitism.

Note 2: It is not all that surprising that *Crossfire* lost out at the Academy Awards, since Scott and Dmytryk had just refused to testify for HUAC, been fired from RKO, and blacklisted in the film industry. How could *Crossfire* possibly have been recognized by the Academy under these circumstances? Recognizing *Gentleman's Agreement*, the "safe" anti-anti-Semitism film, however, might have assuaged those in the film industry who wanted to encourage and reward social problem filmmaking and show the world that Hollywood had not been cowed by HUAC.

Note 3: The literature on film noir is extensive, and the term itself, in fact, continues to be hotly debated. Though all agree that the term was coined by French critics after World War Two, the consensus ends there. The history and terrain of the debate are examined in more detail in James Naremore's delightful book *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Other key works that offer more than a cursory mention of *Crossfire* include Foster Hirsch, *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), and Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981) discusses *Crossfire* primarily as a failed message movie. Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987); Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); and Lester Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982) focus broadly on representations of Jewishness in Hollywood films and tend to emphasize *Crossfire's* inadequacies in comparison to *Gentleman's Agreement*. See also Leonard Leff and Jerrold Simmons, "Film into Story: The Narrative Schema of *Crossfire*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 12:3 (1984): 171–179.

Note 4: Eric Goldman, "The Fight to Bring the Subject of Anti-Semitism to the Screen: The Story of the Production of *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*," *Davka* 5:3 (Fall 1975): 24; Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988); and Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) explore the debate among Jewish organizations. In contrast, Thomas Cripps, in *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), makes insightful connections between the anti-anti-Semitism films of 1947 and the important postwar cycle of "message films" that significantly altered Hollywood representations of African Americans.

Note 5: See, for example, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood:*

Politics in the Film Community, 1930–60 (New York: Doubleday, 1980); Brian Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); Keith Kelly and Clay Steinman, "Crossfire: A Dialectical Attack," *Film Reader* 3 (February 1978): 106–127; and Darryl Fox, "Crossfire and HUAC: Surviving the Slings and Arrows of the Committee," *Film History* 3 (1989): 29–37. Several of the works discussed earlier—particularly those by Cripps, Gabler, and Naremore—are also particularly well historicized.

Note 6: Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 12.

Note 7: Recent studies reevaluating the critical role of the producer in the studio system include George F. Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) and Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Note 8: Scott never wrote publicly about when or why he joined the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), though there is little doubt that he was a member. Norma Barzman, screenwriter and one of Scott's closest friends, remembers that he was in the Party at the same time as her husband Ben, who joined in 1939. The FBI file on Scott, however, dates the beginning of his Party involvement to the early 1940s. Norma Barzman, interview with author, April 1999; Barzman, interview with Larry Ceplair, in Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 5. See also Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 116, and Dick, *Radical Innocence*, 122–123.

Note 9: John Paxton to Keith Kelly and Clay Steinman, July 1977, in Paxton Biographical File, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [AMPAS], Los Angeles, California.

Note 10: Barzman, interview with author, April 1999; Neve, *Film and Politics in America*, 87.

Note 11: In addition to his work on progressive feature films, Scott was a founding member of the Motion Picture Guild, an independent group dedicated to making socially relevant documentaries and shorts. Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 116; Dick, *Radical Innocence*, 122–123.

Note 12: Marsha Hunt, interview with Glenn Lovell, in McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 318.

Note 13: On Thalberg the man and the myth, see Gabler, *Empire of Their Own*, 218–236.

Note 14: I was surprised to find how completely Adrian Scott has dropped off the historical radar. Though the blacklist explains much, Scott's work has not benefited particularly from the revisionist project to reclaim the work and reputations of the blacklisted. In a fairly representative example, Andrew Dickos, in his otherwise very informative recent history of noir, lists some of the producers who "distinguished themselves in noir production," including Hal Wallis, Mark Hellinger, Joan Harrison, Edward Small, and Bob Roberts—but not Adrian Scott. Dickos even commends Dore Schary, "who, as production head at RKO, allowed from 1947 to 1949, the biggest concentration of noir filmmaking to be done"—but fails to mention RKO's leading producer of noir, Adrian Scott. Andrew Dickos, *Street with No Name: A History of the Classic American Film Noir* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 173.

Note 15: Paxton to Kelly and Steinman, June 20, 1977, in Paxton Bio File, AMPAS.

Note 16: Paxton to Keith Kelly and Clay Steinman, n.d. [July 1977], in Paxton Bio File, AMPAS.

Note 17: Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 323.

Note 18: On film noir and Hollywood's wartime shortages, Sheri Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), especially chapter 2.

Note 19: Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 238.

Note 20: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1983, 1991).

Note 21: The American response to Japanese fascism was markedly different. Indeed, the subtle and overt racism of American representations of the Japanese enemy during World War Two illustrates the limitations of inclusion in wartime popular nationalism. See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

Note 22: On the appeal of fascism, see John P. Diggins, "Flirtation with Fascism: American Pragmatic Liberals and Mussolini's Italy," *American Historical Review* 71 (January 1966), and Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Note 23: For general discussions of wartime rhetoric and ideology, see Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1998), especially chapter 10; William S. Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); and Philip Gleason, "Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity," *The Review of Politics* 43 (1981): 483–518. On Hollywood during the war, see Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), especially chapter 4. For a concise summary of the Popular Front, see Mark Naison, "Remaking America: Communists and Liberals in the Popular Front," in *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*, ed. Michael Brown et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 45–74.

Note 24: See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Karen Brodtkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Note 25: Gleason, "Americans All," especially 497–512.

Note 26: Graebner, *The Age of Doubt*, 54–55, 146.

Note 27: A number of key events in 1947 signaled the rollback of the New Deal agenda and a definitive shift to the policies and mentality of the Cold War and anti-Communist Americanism, including passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and the founding of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Note 28: Henry R. Luce, *The American Century* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1941); Henry A. Wallace, *Century of the Common Man: Two Speeches by Henry A. Wallace* (New York: International Workers Order, Inc., 1943), in Wallace File, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles; Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 232–233; Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xi–xii, 101.

Note 29: The literature on Cold War anti-Communism is exhaustive. The general texts I have found particularly useful include David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University

Press, 1990); Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976); Norman N. Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941–1948* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947–1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978); Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); and Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). On the rhetoric of totalitarianism, see Les K. Adler and Thomas K. Patterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s," *American Historical Review* 75:4 (April 1970): 1046–1064; Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and of course, Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; New York: Harvest Books, 1973).