

id Smith had faces. You could photograph their alertness, their wit, their humanity. In John Doe you presented an expressionless mask; not John Doe, the average American, but John Doe, the legal abstraction, first created to suit the needs of corporate law and now used by you to suit the needs of a story of corporate treachery. And here, Frank, is the crux of the matter. *Meet John Doe* is not a story of John Doe or the people but a story of corporate treachery out of which you try to twist a moral for the people without consulting them.

The proof of this is in your character development. There is only one rich, positive, resourceful, and convincing character in *Meet John Doe*. That is the fascist, the real protagonist of your picture. The world is his stage and all the men and women on it his players. It is no surprise that the philosophy which emerges from the film is his philosophy: "Politics is a mug's game." And that philosophy is not only a negation of the best in the American tradition; it is also a negation of the tradition of Frank Capra as represented by Mr. Deeds and Mr. Smith.

Let us examine the passivity of your "people." They are drawn like filings to a magnet when the fascist sends out a call through his newspapers. They play no part in developing, qualifying, or creating the movement. They just join. There is no more democracy in the John Doe Clubs than in the storm troopers. And since the people have no part in the movement's struggle, the whole thing falls apart when the leader rats. Contrast this with the history of the United Automobile Workers and their erstwhile leader Homer Martin; when he ratted, they threw him out and went on to organize and grow. It was their movement, not Martin's. They have a saying of Jefferson's—there should be an upsurge of the people every twenty years, but in auto it's every two years.

You may ask whether your exposure of the fascist does not make the film true and valuable for the people. But when you merely say that the fascists are mugs and the people should have nothing to do with them, you speak the mug's language. If the people do not struggle against the mugs the people are canceled out. For as long as you present no program of opposition to the powers of decadence and destruction, your rescue of the people from the "messy political struggle" leaves the people completely unprepared and helpless against attack. To ask the people to make the best of the present is to subscribe to pessimism, to counsel against growth, to negate and proscribe a better future. Nothing could be more opposed to the historical necessity which makes of the people the force of progress.

You yourself recognize this in part; for when your people are faced with destruction, you do contrive to set them in motion again. But when you warn them against the full implications of their actions, you lead them in two opposite directions at once; one historical and effective, the other abstract and immobil-

izing. Those in power always attempt first to cajole into immobility those whose common needs are drawing them together. Moral Rearmament, which swept the front pages of the newspapers a few years ago, asked us all to forswear selfishness, but it asked us to do so in the relative positions of the *status quo*. It hoped thus to perpetuate existing inequalities and to end the struggle of the dispossessed for their rights. Moral Rearmament failed because it was not of the people and invited them to frustration and self-destruction.

Workable theory cannot be spun entirely out of the head of one individual; neither can workable character. Politics can be brushed aside neither in life nor in the movies. There is no escape from the struggle of reality. The people make history, they do not concoct it. They make it under tremendous pressures, on the basis of vast common interests and needs, under tested leadership, and independently of ruling classes and their false leaders and phony slogans. The genuine slogans come out of the mouths of Deeds and Smith, but never out of the mouth of John Doe.

We in Hollywood have a tremendous responsibility to American history; a responsibility not to distort, to malign, to misrepresent motives. There is no better way to understand what our people are than to understand what made them that way. Study of our history and character will lead us to tap the boundless resourcefulness, the independence, and the creative energy of the average American, the real John Doe.

HERBERT BIBERMAN.

The Face of China

"Ku Kan" provides a fine introduction to the unbeatable Chinese people.

"**K**U KAN," at New York's World Theater, is the record made by one man, alone with a technicolor camera, in the middle of China. During the past few years Rey Scott has made four trips to that country, traveling far up the Yangtze, exploring Tibetan lamaseries, hunting the giant panda, following the Burma Road and the road leading to the Soviet Union, marveling at the wheatfields and fruit trees of the northwestern provinces, filming universities and factories and cooperatives, living through an air raid on Chungking. The result is a documentary film of extraordinary scope. Considered solely as a travelogue, *Ku Kan* is a splendid achievement; it pioneers in exploration and photography of country and people we know too little about. But it is much more than a travelogue. Mr. Scott has centered his film on the heroism and the unity of the Chinese people.

The new China is presented against a background of the old. There is much that is familiar; the strange sails of Chinese junks, the carved Tibetan temples. The film concentrates, however, not on scenery and stonework

but on the daily lives of people. Whether he is photographing a lama turning a prayer-wheel or a factory worker puddling steel, Rey Scott has a remarkable gift for catching character with his camera. The Chinese people are of a hundred different tribal strains, they worship in a hundred different ways, they have a million different faces to show the camera; yet in a sense they all have the same face. It is the face of determination. The bearded Mohammedan soldiers, the guerrilla fighters, the women of Chungking fanning themselves and waiting for the end of the air raid, all have the same unflinching eyes as the Japanese planes come over in the blue sky.

Following the chronology of Mr. Scott's travels, *Ku Kan* goes up the Burma Road to Chungking. We see the trucks going through, and the workmen endlessly repairing the precarious and often bombed roadway. We see Chungking itself, already damaged by raids, but still standing for the most part; and here we are taken to the university, moved bodily from the coast with its microscopes, its gymnasiums, and its students. Factories, too, have been moved from the coast, equipment packed for hundreds of miles on the backs of men, such men as we are shown carrying military supplies slung across their shoulders and walking with a spry little trot which minimizes the load. Cooperatives for handicrafts have been set up; we see the absorbed faces of the workers as they spin and weave and make rope.

Other scenes show us the guerrilla fighters leaving their fields and running to get their hidden rifles; the young men of the Chinese army reading their wall newspaper, drilling in front of anti-Japanese posters. Then *Ku Kan* moves on into less familiar country. Mr. Scott photographs the "shy people," mountaineers in kilts, who come to the towns rarely but have come in numbers to fight Japan. He takes us through the sheep country, rather like our own West, where everyone eats mutton, and rice is a luxury. We see a cargo of melons ferried across the Yangtze on a raft of inflated goatskins; a craftsman carving a wooden saddle; a little girl trying not to look at the camera and failing, to her own amusement. As Mr. Scott swings south, we meet the ancient shrine of Kum Bum and Little Orchid, the giant panda. There is a delightful interlude in which Little Orchid gives Mr. Scott the works.

Ku Kan sobers again and moves swiftly to its climax. Back in Chungking, Scott photographs the twin lanterns of the air raid warning hoisted aloft. The people of the city move, soberly and without panic, to shelters beneath its huge walls and to the comparative safety of the opposite river bank. The fire-fighting trucks take their stations, and the few Chinese fighter planes take off.

Then the Japanese planes are over by dozens. Scott's technicolor is brilliant here; the air raid scenes have a horrible beauty that intensifies their tragedy. The little white planes, high up, drop their bombs and smoke flowers up from each crash until the entire



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city is lost from sight. Meanwhile there is the dreadful sound of crashing buildings, and the women on the opposite shore, watching their homes blown to bits, fan themselves quietly.

The air raid is over; but the fires are just starting. They are enormous, covering whole sections of the city, while the fire-trucks fight desperately against them with hand-pumps. One man runs with enormous wooden buckets to fill the pump's reservoir. Whole streets fall in with a crash, and the sun turns copper-colored behind the smoke. When it is all over, when the fires are dying and the daylight is gray again, the people of Chungking come to the ruins and begin, patiently, the work of salvage. The new war orphans are collected and given clothing.

It is impossible to convey the tremendous emotional intensity of these scenes. One thing does emerge; the resolve of China to go on fighting. *Ku Kan* shows this as well as talking about it. Perhaps the film emphasizes a little too much the personality of Chiang Kai-shek as the unifying force; the resistance of China's people goes deeper than Chiang. Similarly, one might ask for more than a casual mention of the Eighth Route Army. But *Ku Kan* does concentrate upon the Chinese people, does show the guerrilla fighters, does photograph the camel caravans arriving with supplies from the Soviet Union.

Inevitably, the picture has the defects of its merits. Its technicolor is uneven, sometimes a little shrill; Mr. Scott could hardly get ideal studio conditions along the Yangtze. For the most part, though, it is surprisingly good color. Scott's own running comment throughout the film I found a little annoying at times, when rhetoric threatens to run away with it. The sincerity of the commentator, however, saves him. In spite of technical crudities, *Ku Kan* remains a magnificent introduction to the unbeatable Chinese people.

"OUT OF THE FOG," the film version of Irwin Shaw's *The Gentle People*, has received a stylized production which keeps it from being a great picture. The unfortunate change of title sets the keynote; rarely, in the film, does Brooklyn emerge clearly from the haze. There is a certain staginess about the photography and the acting, and the tempo and rhythm of the dialogue, though unusual and interesting, manage by that very unusualness to seem slightly unreal.

In spite of all this, *Out of the Fog* is so good as to leave this reviewer without a chance to exercise her poison pen. A tale of decent, ordinary human beings threatened by a gangster, the film has obvious symbolism, and its final rallying of the gentle people to destroy the gangster is the rallying of the oppressed the world over. Fortunately, however, *Out of the Fog* does not rely on symbolism for its interest. The characters are sharply drawn, the situations valid. Stella, the telephone operator who wants something a little better than all the other girls in the subway get, is at times almost unbearably

poignant in Ida Lupino's skillful hands. Her hopeless turning to the gangster who promises some sort of way out is a natural individual reaction as well as a symbol of defrauded youth's turning to fascist violence. And the two old men, a cook and a tailor, whose dream is freedom on a fishing boat and who are forced to pay protection money to the gangster, are people you have known on your street in Brooklyn or the Bronx or New Hampshire or South Dakota.

Brilliant acting by Thomas Mitchell and John Qualen brings life to the two old men, and John Garfield is appropriately hardboiled as the racketeer, a part which affords him little opportunity to get beneath the surface. In minor parts, Aline MacMahon, Eddie Albert, and Leo Gorcey stand out. The effect of the acting is weakened, however, by the unnecessary length of most speeches, a length which also slows down camera action and frequently makes the film seem static.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

Acting as Fine Art

Some lessons from the Broadway season just past.

AN ACTOR, like any other human being, functions best in a collectivity. On this principle, among others, there was founded the late Group Theater, that desired—and in a measure succeeded in achieving—a continuous and closely knit organization that worked together, played together, was cognizant of the problems of its individual members, and assisted them over a period of time toward the development of their personalities, both as actors and as human beings. For just as it is true that by living an actor can learn better how to act, so it is also true that by acting an actor can also learn how to live. Given this ideal organization—a cohesive group that works together over a long period of time—and given the ability to act, direct, stage, light, and design—we should have the ideal theater, a true theater collective where the contribution of each individual counts toward the final product and exemplifies the validity of the slogan: From each, according to his ability; to each, according to his needs.

In the absence of a true theater collective, it is also true that individual performers, through temperament or training, can occasionally rise out of an undistinguished ensemble to achieve real distinction. The average Broadway acting company—a scattered group gathered solely for the purpose of a single production—is generally torn by contradictions. The "star system" prevails; the performer with reputation and a following is catered to, and he not only demands, but receives top-billing, on the billboards and on the stage itself. It is this system which almost invariably throws the entire performance out of focus, from the standpoint of an integrated job. In Soviet films and productions, you will notice that the least important roles

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