

**U.S.A.** *Charges and countercharges fly fast this year, and diversionary tactics confuse the real issues. J. Parnell Thomas uncovers more Communists than he can prove to be Communist (see "Hollywood on Trial," reviewed below). Many opponents of the Administration attack its foreign policy by emphasizing the flaws in our society, such as anti-Semitism, discrimination, social injustice. We must clean our own house, they cry, before we start spring-cleaning abroad. . . . Such tactics are of course, not entirely diversionary. These evils exist, and to maintain a sense of proportion is difficult. It is for this reason that we strongly recommend the reading of such accurate and careful studies on anti-Semitism and the effects of prejudice as Malcolm Ross's "All Manner of Men," on fair employment practices, and the two books by distinguished authors reviewed below: "Mask of Privilege" and "Lost Boundaries."*

## "A Plea in Avoidance"

**HOLLYWOOD ON TRIAL.** By Gordon Kahn. New York: Boni & Gaer, Inc. 1948. 229 pp. \$3 & \$1.

Reviewed by EMMET LAVERY

AS FAR as it goes, this is a lively and provocative report of the political inquisition which was conducted last October, in the name of Americanism, by Congressman J. Parnell Thomas and sundry brethren of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It is an able job of selective reporting but it leaves much to be desired. Also much to be reported.

Were the non-responsive witnesses members of the Communist Party, as was claimed by Congressman Thomas, and were they therefore a threat to the safety and security of these United States? If not, what was the ultimate philosophy behind their united attitude on the questions of Party membership and certain guild memberships? And how does that philosophy compare with the philosophy and the behavior of other liberals under similar circumstances?

These are a few questions that are not considered in this spirited account of the so-called "investigation" of the film industry. But, with respect to the questions that are considered, in particular the vital matters of blacklist and censorship, the book speaks with authority, vigor, and humor. Gordon Kahn, the editor of this volume, and the former editor of *The Screen Writer*, was not one of the "unfriendly ten" witnesses from Hollywood but he was present at the Washington hearings and he was one of those under subpoena to testify at subsequent hearings which have not yet been scheduled. With the assistance of these ten, who now face trial in Federal Court for contempt of Congress, Mr. Kahn has assembled a pointed chronicle of the times.



Yet, when all is said and done, this is what the lawyers call a plea in avoidance. It is an eloquent plea and, at some points, a moving one. It is timed to hit the book stands, just as the first of the witnesses goes to trial in Washington, D.C., and the royalties from the volume will go to the defense fund of the authors. But the plea in this book is not equal to the cause which it sets out to defend. The argument is left exactly where the ten left it last fall.

Why, many writers will want to know, do the defendants still choose to conceal their membership in the guilds concerned? Especially when neither guild has ever asked for such concealment? Why does the book omit the testimony of the president of the Screen Writers Guild, who chose to waive his constitutional rights and who was heard at some length in defense of a broad liberal position? Just how did the ten reach their common decision not to give immediately responsive answers to the questions of guild membership and Party membership? Was it by group agreement? With or without approval of counsel? And what were the alternatives? Was this the only action open to a true liberal? If so, how

about the eleventh witness. Bertold Brecht, whose testimony is covered in some detail? Mr. Brecht chose to speak quite freely. So, under similar circumstances, did Paul Robeson, who made a brilliant presentation of his political creed on October 7, 1946 in a hearing before State Senator Jack Tenney and his California Committee on Un-American Activities. In that hearing Robeson chose to answer every question put to him and the result, even for people who did not agree with Robeson, was a rare emotional and intellectual experience. Where then shall articulate liberals take their cue, when called to the witness stand? With Brecht and Robeson or with the relatively silent ten?

One word of caution is in order about a misleading paragraph which deals with Thurman Arnold. Without identifying the exact role of Mr. Arnold, who is now serving as special counsel to the Screen Writers Guild, the inference is given that he in some way approves of the particular legal strategy which these defendants have followed in the contempt cases. The flat statement is also made that Mr. Arnold has predicted that these defendants will be vindicated, when and if their cases reach the United States Supreme Court. Both the inference and the statement are wide of the mark. Mr. Arnold has made no such prediction nor has he presumed to approve the strategy of witnesses whom he does not represent. At this moment he is representing the Screen Writers Guild in legal proceedings designed to test, for the benefit of all guild members, the right of studios to discharge or to suspend employees upon the mere *accusation* by a grand jury that they are guilty of an offense against the laws of the land. It is quite possible that, in these proceedings, the Guild and Mr. Arnold may be able to explore the reality and/or extent of various forms of blacklisting which have been urged upon the film industry from time to time by associates of Congressman Thomas. But the exploration is a Guild undertaking. The Guild and Mr. Arnold are not appearing in support of the writers in the contempt cases nor are they appearing in support of the writers in the actions for damages which they have filed against the studios. The matter of contempt, like the matter of damages, is still an individual problem confronting the individual writer.

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## Sickness & Remedy

A MASK FOR PRIVILEGE, *Anti-Semitism in America*. By Carey McWilliams. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1948. 299 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ROGER N. BALDWIN

DESPITE the extensive literature on anti-Semitism, an addition to it by Carey McWilliams is bound to present a fresh and challenging view with a program of action. His previous studies of racial minorities in "Brothers Under the Skin" and in "Prejudice," the story of the Japanese minority in America, have given him the distinction of authority on discrimination. His books distill wide research, reading, and observation fitted into a pattern of democratic principles and conclusions. Packed with quotations, incidents, facts, they each present the failures of American democracy to achieve equality for racial and national minorities. Although essentially the work of a reformer, they are written with a documented detachment calculated to reach even the unconverted.

The thesis of "A Mask for Privilege" is that "anti-Semitism has always been used by the enemies of the people for the purpose of arresting progress in periods of social upheaval and social stress." Anti-Semitism is a "swamp fever exhaled by sick people in a sick society." In the United States it has grown alarmingly as an attitude, as the "spectacular" results of a recent Roper poll showed. But its expression flows chiefly from non-governmental agencies, acting in conflict with our traditions of equality, and due in origin to the "undemocratic social order that came with the rise of industrial capitalism" in the latter part of the last century.

Though Mr. McWilliams, of course, concedes that the position of Jews in American life is far more favorable than that of other minorities, the growth and character of anti-Semitism appear to him more menacing to democratic values than other prejudice because symptomatic of a social disease. He rates it so high as a menace as to identify it with Fascism in the United States, using the two words interchangeably. That there is no Fascism without anti-Semitism is doubtless true; but to make the lesser evil appear to be the whole detracts from the appraisal.

The analysis of anti-Semitism as the evidence of a sick, competitive, undemocratic society seeking a scapegoat in the Jews, of course, brings Mr. McWilliams to an equally sweeping remedy. Only the wholesale reorganization of society on a non-

competitive basis will suffice. Mr. McWilliams does not mention the Soviet Union, yet that is the favored example of those who voice his remedy. He deals with anti-Semitism in Germany and Czarist Russia; the omission of any reference to the Soviet dispensation is striking.

For the more practical immediate steps Mr. McWilliams advances chiefly the utility of laws against discrimination, citing with warm approval the recent recommendations of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, the proposals of the Human Rights Commission of the UN, and other legislative supports of equality before the law. He thinks little of most of the efforts for education, tolerance, interracial and intercultural cooperation, and anti-defamation. He would penalize anti-Semitism in its organized expressions but he does not rate penalties high. He yearns most eagerly for a vital force for equality in the dream of a "great, special camp" of all the democratic forces in the United States.

This surely is the long and wishful view of American democracy, as is his view of capitalist transformation. But long and wishful views are tonic to the discussion of so stubborn and ancient a social problem.

## Checkered Society

LOST BOUNDARIES. By W. L. White. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1948. 91 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by HAL BORLAND

THERE is a strange emotional story behind the calm, factual account which W. L. White has written in "Lost Boundaries," and I am almost convinced that it is the unwritten story that is the more important.

The story Mr. White tells is that of the Johnston family, father, mother, and three children, who lived in a small New England town. The father was a country doctor. The eldest boy, Albert Jr., was a star pupil and athlete in high school. Then war came and the father attempted to enlist in the Navy. It seemed he was to get a commission, as he deserved. The Navy investigated, found that he had Negro blood, and rejected him.

Then the parents told Albert, Jr., the facts which they had kept so long hidden. Both father and mother came from Negro families. Both were so light in color that they readily passed as white. They had forsaken their Negro background years ago and made a respected, prosperous place for themselves beyond the color line. There it was. They were all Negroes.

Nothing had changed outwardly. Even when word of the Negro blood spread through the community, practically no doors closed to the Johnstons. But inwardly the whole world came down around young Albert's staggering shoulders. And here is the part of the story that must be read between the lines, for Mr. White tells only the facts. Young Albert began to segregate himself, to watch fearfully for prejudice.

He found it, of course. He went into an emotional breakdown. Then he set out to identify himself with Negro America. He went to visit relatives he had never seen, reaching for roots and stability in Negro life. He failed to find them, in Cleveland, in Chicago, in Los Angeles. For he found prejudice everywhere, not only among whites but among Negroes as well. Light-colored Negroes were prejudiced against darker ones, and the dark ones were suspicious of light-colored ones.

He returned home. He had not found peace or complete understanding, but he had seen some of the background of his problem. He entered the University of New Hampshire, and there he made his choice. At a seminar on the Negro problem, he announced that he had Negro blood.

The assumption is that here is tragedy, perhaps high tragedy. Mr. White has avoided the theatrical, the overwrought drama that has marked most of the fiction on this subject. There is no sensationalism here. It is straight reporting, and excellent reporting, of what happens to a young man, to a whole family, when the minority problem comes down out of the realm of theory to possess one as a person.

The strange fact is that what happens is intensely personal rather than social. And here again one must read between the lines. The community where young Albert Johnston had grown up had long suspected Negro blood in the family, but had held no prejudice, accepting all the Johnstons at their own evaluation, taking them for what they were as people. Then the Johnstons changed, and there was a slight but inevitable change in those around them.

Those who would have us believe that any minority problem lies wholly in the attitudes of the majority ignore this factor. Once a minority, group or individual, sets itself apart and becomes acutely conscious of its minority status, even the most generous majority tends to recognize the difference. That is not the whole of the problem, by any means; but it is a factor too seldom recognized. Perhaps in writing this brief, simple account of one family, with so much to be read beyond the statement of the words, Mr. White has contributed a great deal to eventual understanding.

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