

# 'Gentleman's Agreement'

[20th Century-Fox]—On Anti-Semitism; Finely Done

ANTI-SEMITISM is the subject of and the "heavy" in this finely produced and acted motion picture. It is not the criminal horror of Hitler's Europe but, rather, the cruelties and discriminations, the insulting attitudes and arrogant prejudices exercised against Jews in these United States with which the picture is concerned.

No need to tell you Darryl Zanuck, the producer, is offering you something different in the way of screen fare. He tells the story frankly, depicting in both incident and dialogue, the pitiful manifestations of false superiority. He names names—Bilbo, Rankin, Gerald L. K. Smith, and places—Darrien, New Canaan, and audiences will recognize their counterparts.

This is not to say that "Gentleman's Agreement" is either a documentary or a preaching. It is first and always a motion picture; a good one and one that will be seen and talked about for long. Holding it together is a Gregory Peck-Dorothy McGuire romance, tender and tempestuous, by turn, that will sell tickets and please audiences within this setting as well as it would in any other.

Peck is a magazine writer assigned to do an article on anti-Semitism. A stranger in New York, he hits upon the idea of posing as a Jew in order

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MOTION PICTURE DAILY

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to obtain his facts through personal experience. His device is known to Miss McGuire; cast as the niece of Peck's publisher, the latter played by Albert Dekker. She believes herself to be wholeheartedly opposed to prejudice but Peck begins to have misgivings when she reveals to members of his family, after they have become engaged, that he is not a Jew.

The breaking point comes when Miss McGuire declines to make available an unused cottage she owns in a "restricted" community to Peck's lifelong Jewish friend, played by John Garfield, on the latter's return from overseas service, although Garfield is unable to obtain living accommodations elsewhere and, consequently, it means he must forego a good position and a reunion with his family.

Miss McGuire discusses her shattered romance with Garfield and asks him if he believes she is anti-Semitic. He reassures her on that score but points out that much of hers and Peck's misunderstandings had arisen because of her passive attitude toward prejudice. Her first act is to offer her cottage to Garfield and it leads to her reconciliation with Peck.

ALWAYS to the fore is the living experience of Peck as a Jew gathering material for his article. There are the mean innuendos about race, the name-calling even among children, the epithets, the groundless accusations, some revolting, some embarrassing. But none of it is unreal, none far-fetched. A "gentleman's agreement," an understanding among property owners of a "restricted" community not to sell to a Jew when they dispose of their property, is the picture's explanation of its title.

Outstanding performances are to be credited to Peck, Miss McGuire, Garfield and Anne Revere, the latter as Peck's mother. A large supporting cast is uniformly good, particularly Celeste Holm, as a successful career woman with a hungry heart to whom Peck turns momentarily when his romance with Miss McGuire takes the wrong turn; Dean Stockwell, as Peck's motherless son; Dekker as the publisher; Jane Wyatt as Miss McGuire's sister; June Havoc as a Jewess with anti-Semitic tendencies, and Sam Jaffe as a Jewish scientist.

This wealth of talent, and more that must go unmentioned here, has been expertly directed by Elia Kazan. Moss Hart provided the distinguished screen play, based on the novel by Laura Z. Hobson.

The huge audience that read the best-selling novel will be sure to be attracted by the picture. It is a safe bet that they will find it better than the original. The great majority of critics will applaud it and will increase its audience. It is just as certain to be disliked by some and to be avoided by others. If that were not so, the book need never have been written nor the picture produced. By and large, however, "Gentleman's Agreement" should be a money picture as well as a production milestone.

Running time, 118 minutes. General classification. Release, not set.

SHERWIN KANE