

'Strange Career of Jim Crow'— From the 1877 Betrayal to Today

By CYRIL BRIGGS

In his latest book, "The Strange Career of Jim Crow" (Oxford, \$2.50), C. Van Woodward effectively demolishes the myth of the immutable character of Southern society, its immemorial and ineradicable customs and prejudices.

In the light of the current struggle on school desegregation and the successful use of that myth by both the Eisenhower administration and Dixiecrats in browbeating the U.S. Supreme Court into decreeing a gradualist approach to school desegregation, Professor Woodward's book is most timely.

Woodward, tracing the development of racist violence against the freedmen following their betrayal by the North and the withdrawal of Federal troops from the South in 1877, shows that the cult of white supremacy, with its disfranchisement and ostracising devices, did not flourish until the latter years of the last century.

Indeed, it was in the last decade of the 19th Century and the first two decades of this century that, coincidentally with U.S. imperialist adventures in the Pacific and Caribbean, anti-Negro legislation mushroomed throughout the South.

Woodward flatly rejected the popular conception that with the overthrow of the Reconstruction governments there spontaneously arose a popular movement, generated by sectional bitterness against the North and fear of Negro domination, to enforce Negro disfranchisement.

Relations between the races continued to be relatively harmonious,



he maintains, even after the defeat of Reconstruction.

He hastens to add that it was not a golden age of race relations. "It was after all," he points out, "in the '80's and early '90's that lynching attained the most staggering proportions ever reached in the history of that crime."

Moreover, the fanatical advocates of racism, whose doctrines of total segregation, disfranchisement, and ostracism eventually triumphed over all opposition, were already at work and already beginning to establish domination over some phases of Southern life."

There was still, however, staunch opposition on the part of large sections of population and press to the doctrines of the extreme racists. This was particularly true of the Populist Party, which at the height of its Southern popularity conduct-

ed a vigorous fight against the racist demagogues and their allies, the local compradors of Northern financial interests.

Tom Watson, Populist candidate for President in 1904 who later became one of the most virulent Negrophobists, said Negroes and whites were "made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism, which enslaves you both."

The Richmond (Va.) Dispatch of Oct. 13, 1886, declared in an editorial:

"We repeat that nobody here objects to sitting in political conventions with Negroes. Nobody here objects to serving on juries with Negroes. No lawyer objects to practicing law in court where Negro lawyers practice. . . . Colored men are allowed to introduce bills into the Virginia legislature; and in both branches of this body Negroes are allowed to sit, as they have a right to sit."

That the extreme racists finally had their way is attributed by Woodward "not so much to conversion" as to a relaxation of opposition, beginning with the Compromise of 1877 which left the freedmen to the tender mercies of their former masters, and by following through with their desertion by Northern liberals and a succession of racist decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court between 1873 and 1898.

Northern liberal had shamelessly capitulated to white supremacists, even made common cause with them against the Negro, as Woodward points out: "It was quite common in the 'eighties and 'nineties to find in the Nation, Harper's Weekly, the North American Review, or the Atlantic Monthly Northern liberals and former Abolitionists mouthing the shibboleths of white supremacy regarding the Negro's innate inferiority, shiftlessness, an dhopeless unfitnes for full participation in the white man's civilization."

U.S. imperialist adventures in the Pacific and Caribbean, setting off a wave of national chauvinism, clinched the racists' triumph. "In the South," Woodward records, "leaders of the white-supremacy movement thoroughly grasped and expounded the implication of the new imperialist for their domestic policies." The doctrines of Anglo-Saxon superiority used by Northern spokesmen to justify the rape of Hawaii, the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico differed in no essential from Southern race theories.

Woodward notes the changing climate in the South, the victories of the Negro people in the fight to break down barriers to higher education and the franchise, the sustained "mounting crescendo of enthusiasm and pressure" of the "twentieth-century crusade for Negro rights," the impact on the U.S. thought, North and South, of the anti-fascist war, and the current worldwide condemnation of U.S. racist policies and practices.

The book has several shortcomings: (a) it presents for too optimistic a picture of the extent to which integration in the armed forces has been carried out; (b) it tends to minimize, when not ignoring, the pressure exerted upon government and political parties by the Negro people and their allies, at home and overseas, and to credit the federal government and bourgeois politicians for reforms undertaken under that pressure.

These shortcomings are minor in contrast to the book's general excellence and timeliness.

MGM, UA KNEEL BEFORE CATHOLIC CENSOR BOARD

HOLLYWOOD.—The Catholic Legion of Decency, now has an openly recognized dictatorship over all films distributed by Metro Goldwyn Mayer and United Artists, film magazine Variety revealed this week.

In a "super-colossal" surrender, MGM and United Artists now require that independents with whom they sign contracts deliver films to the studios with at least a "B" rating from the "super" snoop group, which concerns itself with politics (anti-labor politics) as well as sex.

This is the first time, said Variety, that producers have been forced to meet censorial standards other than those of the Film Production Code of Motion Picture Assn. of America.

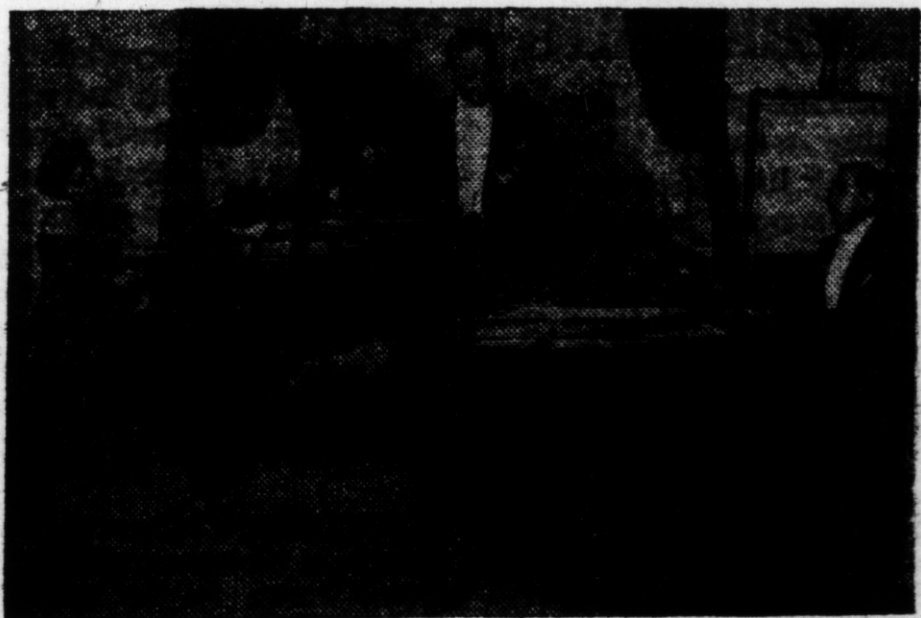
The new censorship may play havoc with independent film production, Variety added.

The Catholic agency has already compelled producer Robert Aldrich to make 30 cuts, including the entire ending of the picture, on "Kiss Me Deadly."

MGM's new distribution contract says they can call the bank loans of any independent producer who balks at the Legion's rulings, and the producer is barred from trying to get off the hook by distributing his picture through other channels.

In the past, the distributor has always stood the cost of any changes made for censorship or other reasons.

The new censorship is particularly deadly, said Variety, because the Catholic group arrogantly refuses to edit scripts or scenes in advance and only issues its arbitrary edicts after a film is completed and ready for release.



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