

DISCUSSION LEADER'S GUIDE

# A DAY IN THE NIGHT OF JONATHAN MOLE

A Film about Prejudice and Discrimination

*"A frank presentation of the causes of bigotry and their threat to human rights."*

F. H. Hall, Chairman  
Human Rights Committee  
Canadian Labour Congress

*"... a landmark in educational films."*

Dr. Gordon Allport  
Harvard University, author of  
"The Nature of Prejudice"

*"... telling dramatic power."*

John R. Seally  
Sociologist  
author of "Crestwood Heights"

*"Congratulations on a fine achievement..."*

Oscar Cohen  
Anti-Defamation League  
New York

Produced by THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA  
for the FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR



# IT CAN HAPPEN HERE!

Canadians were shocked, on the eve of a new decade, to read that buildings in Montreal and Vancouver had been daubed with swastikas.

Such outbreaks are the work of the "lunatic fringe". But much subtler, and perhaps more insidious forms of racial and religious discrimination are faced daily by the dozens of minority groups in Canada.

There are those who suggest that if the problem be ignored, it will "just go away". The weight of expert opinion, however, indicates that this is not the case. We all suffer from some prejudice to some degree, and it is difficult to face up to one's own shortcomings. But the problem exists and it must be faced squarely. To assist the audience in facing this sensitive topic this film has been made.

It is intended as a spark plug for your group. It should get the discussion started.

# A DAY IN THE NIGHT OF JONATHAN MOLE

16mm Black & White  
Running Time: 33 minutes

## Synopsis

The film is a fantasy built around a courtroom trial. Johnathan Mole is a bitter and biased Canadian who, one night, dreams he has power and authority. He is in a land called "Adanac", where things are topsy-turvy. In Adanac there is a law which restricts better jobs to people of "pure" stock.

An Indian, a Jew and an immigrant are on trial for breaking this law (the direct opposite of Canada's Fair Employment Practices Act).

Jonathan Mole, as Lord Chief Justice, hears the case. There are witnesses for both sides.

In the end, Mole's prejudices over-ride the reasonable and just arguments for the Defence and he convicts the three men. They are "sentenced" to a lifetime of limited opportunity. Mole wakes from his dream. His dissatisfaction with the real world is tempered by the "happy" realization that there is quite enough prejudice in Canada to perhaps some day build his dream world. Perhaps Adanac wasn't so topsy-turvy, after all.





# ABOUT THE SUBJECT

## ...and the characters

Just what is Prejudice? Discrimination?

There are many definitions. For the purpose of discussion, the following will serve:

**Prejudice** is a frame-of-mind. It is a negative *attitude* toward large groups of people. Like all over-generalizations it is illogical. People will try to justify their prejudices with “reasons”, but these are actually just excuses. This is because prejudice is an emotional attitude. It is not based on reason.

**Discrimination** — as we mean it here — is the *behavior* of prejudiced people. It is the physical act of the person with the prejudiced frame-of-mind. Discrimination can range from Hitler’s gas ovens to the common racial joke. Usually, prejudice is followed by discrimination. But there are many cases where the initially unprejudiced person discriminates unfairly because it’s “the easy way out” — the “thing to do”. We say *initially* unprejudiced for a reason. Whichever comes first, prejudice or discrimination, you will soon have the other. They feed on each other and create a vicious circle.

There are many films which look at prejudice as a *social* problem. This film is more suited as a vehicle for discussion of prejudice as a *personal* problem.

The four witnesses for the prosecution represent types and degrees of intolerance. They are really caricatures, but there is some of them in most of us. If your group is willing to admit this, the film will have been of value. As discussion leader, you will need a clear picture of them all. These notes will help fix them in your memory and refresh it during discussion.

## Mrs. Platitude:

The social climber. Discrimination is obviously of practical value to Mrs. Platitude. By keeping some people down, she helps herself up the social ladder.

Her discrimination is probably not based on any deep-rooted psychological prejudices. But certainly some prejudice has developed to justify her discrimination. Her mind would say, "Since I discriminate against these groups, there *must* be something wrong with them."

However, she undoubtedly supports her church, the United Nations and charitable organizations. She knows that prejudice is "bad". She is unwilling to admit, even to herself, that she suffers from it.

She is the type who uses that old cliché, "Some of my best friends are Jews, but as for . . . etc., etc."

This opener is used to assure listeners that there is really no prejudice involved just before making a nasty and unfair generalization about the Jew. It indicates that the person is at least ashamed of his prejudice, and is unwilling to admit it.

She couches everything in very polite language. She does not want to harm other groups; she just wants to keep them in their place. She treats them not as equals, but as children. As long as they do not threaten her position, she can afford to be "charitable" to them. Besides, this helps ease any feelings of guilt. She does good works, but for the wrong reasons. (The slavers used the same rationalization when they referred to the Negro as a "child of nature" who must be "helped along".)

She sounds terribly reasonable but she denies people opportunities "because they haven't had the opportunity". She perpetuates the wrong, and she has no intention of ever giving them the opportunity to do anything but work in menial capacities.

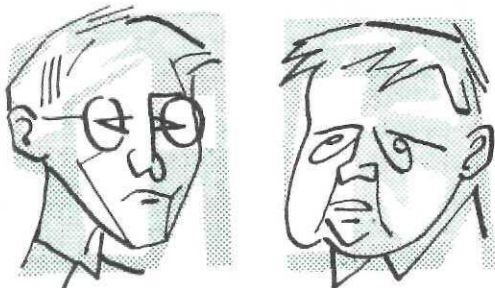


## Peter Parrot:

Here is the conformist. He is less of the liberal than Mrs. Platitude. He probably distrusts the U.N. as vaguely "socialistic" and feels charity is "coddling". But he's not really "sick". He refuses to hire certain groups because the customers "wouldn't like it". He represents a large group who discriminate because they feel it's "the thing to do". Like Mrs. Platitude, his discrimination probably preceded his prejudice. He may have sincerely felt that hiring a Jew, Indian or immigrant would hurt business.

His fears are groundless. But it is clear from his evidence that he has now developed prejudices of his own. He, too, thinks: "I discriminate, therefore they are bad." He places the blame on his customers and avoids his responsibility. (Surveys of actual cases in the U.S. have shown that the employment of members of minority groups as sales clerks has hardly been noticed by customers, much less cut trade.)

What if there were a law *outlawing* discrimination? Parrot may be weak and self-satisfied but he is a law-abiding citizen. He would respect the new law. And he could still avoid responsibility by saying he was just obeying the law. He would stop discriminating, and the vicious circle would be broken. He would make contact with the people he condemned, and much of his prejudice would soon disappear.



## Professor Short-Sight:

The crank with the quack theories. Here is a man with the narrow, rigid outlook of the truly prejudiced personality. He has deep-seated prejudices, taking root probably from childhood. They are emotional and irrational, the symptoms of psychological disorder.

There is none of the hypocrite in him. He believes what he is saying. He has no shame. He has the prejudice, and discriminates unfairly as a result of it. His mind is made up.

But Short-Sight would never admit he was prejudiced. He has his "reasons" for his actions. These "reasons" have a common-sense practical ring to them, but on examination they are revealed as nothing more than tired old theories



which serve as an *excuse* — not a *reason* — for discrimination.

He creates the very conditions he objects to.

He drives groups into despair and poverty and then accuses them of being incapable of “getting ahead”.

Unlike Platitude and Parrot, it is unlikely that any amount of argument would change his mind. However, the Platitudes and Parrots will use his arguments — and may even come to believe them — because such arguments suit their purpose. It is easy to believe something you want to believe.



## Elmer Bigot:

Here is the demagogue, the agitator. He represents a very small but extremely dangerous group. In prosperous times the Bigots are written off as “crackpots”. But when times are hard, they flourish. They provide a focus for a confused and frustrated people. They feed on their fears. Unable to shoulder the blame for their own difficulties, people are inclined to search for a “scapegoat”. Bigots know this, and provide the mob with such a scapegoat — in this case all who are not native-born, white Christians.

Unscrupulous and deranged themselves, the Bigots win over the Short-Sights, Parrots and Platitudes to a vicious “crusade” disguised as a patriotic or religious movement. In Canada, we may find this hard to swallow. But there were millions of Parrots and Platitudes in Germany who first scoffed at Hitler and later came to serve him.

To achieve success, the Bigots use the tricks of the demagogue: The Big Lies (“The Jew . . . controls international high finance”) . . . The Half-Truths and The Insinuations (“There is strong evidence . . .”) . . . The Strong Naked Language (“The grasping hand of the Jew”) . . . The Slogans and The Identification with God (“The Bible says . . .”).

Bigot sees things in black-and-white. He has no give-and-take. He is a sick man, but potentially powerful and dangerous. It is likely that he believes what he says. In difficult times we are all susceptible to the harangues of such a man.



## TO INTRODUCE THE FILM

The subject of the film and the way it is presented may seem strange to some of the audience. They may be disturbed by so open a discussion of a problem they tend to avoid. Others may even be angry if they think something of their own attitude is illustrated on the screen.

To offset annoyance or surprise, a brief introduction to the film may help. This will also prepare the audience for the discussion after the film.

Arrange to distribute the audience's discussion guide before the film is shown and ask the audience to examine it. Then, immediately before the film, tell the audience:

1. That the film is a fable about prejudice and discrimination.
2. That in Canada discrimination in employment because of race, color, creed or nationality is prohibited by the Canada Fair Employment Practices Act. Similar laws have been passed by a majority of the provinces to promote equality of opportunity in employment for all people, irrespective of their origin, color or belief.
3. That after the film there will be an opportunity for discussion. Suggest that they consult their discussion sheet for points of discussion.
4. Explain why you feel it important to try to understand the nature of prejudice and discrimination. If at the time of your showing there have been incidents of prejudice or discrimination reported in the press, you might refer to them.



## AFTER THE FILM

### On Leading Discussion:

1. Encourage a democratic exchange of opinions by the audience. Avoid answering questions yourself — pass them back to the audience.
2. Encourage the more shy members of the audience to express themselves. Occasionally you may have to clarify what a hesitant speaker is trying to say and hold back the eager ones until the less-skilled speaker gets his point across.
3. Aim for an exchange of ideas . . . and keep them moving. Interrupt the marathon speakers and, if discussion wanders too far afield, bring it back to the film. Usually a question or two from you will suffice to recall a runaway discussion.
4. Don't panic at anything said. This film was designed to penetrate beneath polite indifference, to rouse audiences to think and talk about the subject. It may be a touchy subject for some people and provoke anger or bluster. But others will welcome the forthright purpose of the film and defend it.
5. Make sure that, before discussion has gone very far, the audience is agreed on what is meant by *prejudice* and *discrimination*.

## SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### **About Mrs. Platitude:**

Is discrimination really useful in climbing the social ladder ?

Do people accept her kind of hypocrisy ?

Does the wish to be better than others always end in discrimination and prejudice ?

### **About Mr. Parrot:**

How does his attitude differ from Mrs. Platitude's ?

Does Canadian legislation prevent his kind of discrimination ?

What other arguments are used to justify discrimination in employment ?

### **About Professor Short-Sight:**

Why does he try to prove his arguments scientifically ?

Is there any scientific basis for discrimination or prejudice ?

*If he really wished to solve the problems he cites, how could he go about it ?*

### **About Elmer Bigot:**

Do you know of people like him ?

When are they most dangerous ?

Why does so false an appeal win followers ?

Is there a defense against campaigns of Bigots ?

## SPECIALIZED STUDY GROUPS

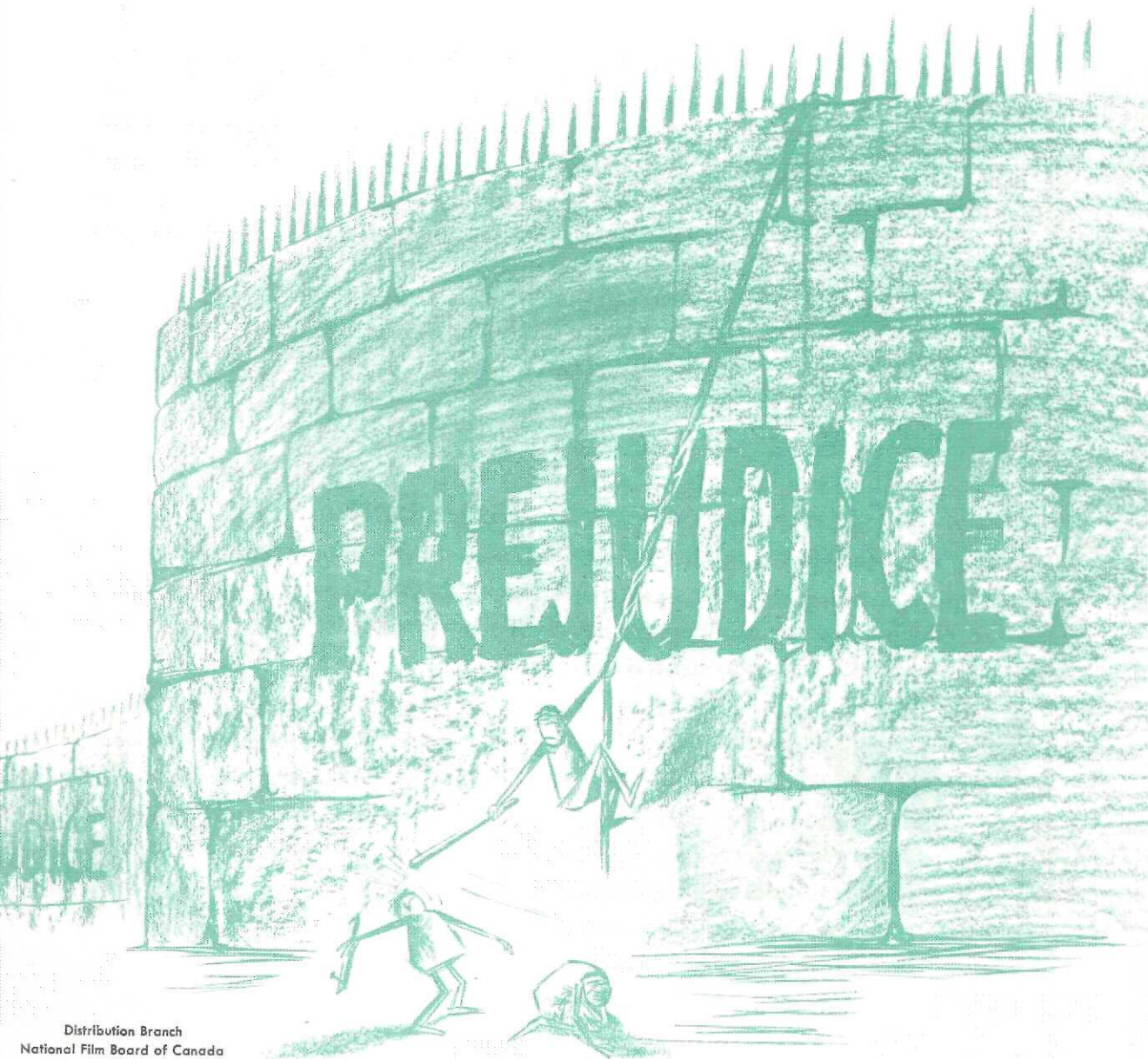
To groups with some more specialized knowledge in this field, "Jonathan Mole" can serve as a springboard for discussion of such areas as: the dynamics of "scape-goating", guilt-projection, the validity of the stereotype, the meaning of "race", rationalizations of the prejudiced, discrimination out of sheer conformity, the manifestations of prejudice in the various income groups, the "self-fulfilling prophecy", the "vicious circle" aspects of prejudice.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

End the discussion at a high point of interest. Some people are keener than others in discussion and may wish to prolong it beyond the allotted time. It is best to conclude when *most* people are still interested and in this way ensure that your next discussion will be well attended.

The nature of prejudice is a good subject for discussion by almost any group. In learning about the roots of prejudice we learn much of the strength and weakness of human character. Such insight cannot help but make life more rewarding. If you wish to hold further discussions, ask your National Film Board representative to recommend other films. Your Public Library will provide a variety of reading materials — books and pamphlets.





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