

Toward Freedom

THE Atlanta Journal's recent "Suppress Uncle Remus?" editorial may be a clever effort to keep a gullible public from catching on to the harmful role which racial stereotypes play in social control; or it may reflect just plain ignorance. In any case, it illustrates a line of talk against which Americans had better beware.

The Journal attacks a column which appeared in The People's Voice, progressive New York weekly, urging mass pressure to block the proposed filming of Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus folk tales. In opposing Walt Disney's projected feature cartoon, P. V. pointed out that in the stories of this legendary character of Uncle Tom days, "the lowest type of dialect is used throughout the dialogue and the handkerchief-head Negro type is glorified."

All this the Journal calls "a pitiable display of ignorance and prejudice . . . not . . . worth nothing save as an example of what right-minded friends of the Negro have to contend with when extremists are let loose."

"Representative southern Negroes," says the editorial, "would never take this distorted view, because they know that Joel Chandler Harris was a wonderful friend to their race



By Doxey Wilkerson

and they can understand the affection in which we hold the memory of the real Uncle Remuses and the real old 'Mammies' of days gone by. The best traditions of the South, far from being a hindrance, can be a mighty help to the solution of current problems."

IN ITS apparently indignant editorial (I cannot believe the editors are ignorant of what they are doing), the Journal illustrates beautifully precisely that vicious technique which justifies vigorous opposition to the proposed Uncle Remus film. Here is a condescending pat-on-the-back for the "representative" southern Negro (the "good nigger," they call him on the sidewalks of Atlanta), praise for those symbols of Negro inferiority which are in "the best traditions of the South," and condemnation for what are called "upstart radicals and ill-tempered theorists" (better known as "bad niggers" in the vernacular of the Old South).

These are typical formulations which powerful men who have vested interests in "white supremacy" for the continued exploitation and oppression of the southern white and Negro masses find it important to strengthen as an integral part of the culture. These are ideological bulwarks of their now tottering Jimcrow structure; hence their eagerness for

"Uncle Remus" and The Modern World

the added help which Uncle Remus in the movies could give.

THE technique of building and perpetuating a distorted stereotype of a people one wants to oppress, of repeating that stereotype so often that it comes in the popular mind to be interpreted as "typical" of the group, and of using this unreal thought-picture as a basis for "justifying" the oppression of the minority people in question—this is an old technique of social control.

The plantation owners used it in their original "justification" of slavery, and later to drive a wedge between the liberated Negroes and their new "poor white" allies in the Reconstruction South. Hitler used it, too, against the Jews—and he taught progressive Americans an important lesson which some had been reluctant before to learn.

We now know that any form of "racism" in this modern world of fascist demagoguery imperils the safety of our nation as a whole. That is why old Uncle Remus, who has delighted many thousands of children with his stories of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox, must now be relegated to that restrictive clientele that reads what is generally called "literature." In the movies he would be a dangerous misfit in our modern world, for he would serve far too well that veiled reaction which lies behind the Journal's editorial.