

**Remember Us:
Holocaust Representations in European-Jewish Émigré Film, 1942-1945**

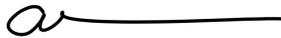
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Abstract

The Jewish and European émigré directors of wartime America tasked themselves with the difficult mission of warning the public against the Nazi threat to Jewish life in Europe. The heightened anti-immigration, isolationist, and nativist attitudes of the 1930s and early 1940s provided an unstable background for émigré directors to tackle controversial subjects in their films. Building on their own experiences with Jewishness and exile from Europe, Ernst Lubitsch, Andre De Toth, and Fred Zinnemann produced the first Holocaust films between 1942 and 1944, over thirty years before American audiences became familiar with the Holocaust as a concept and a unique historical event. Through historical analysis of these Holocaust productions and their directors, and against a backdrop of xenophobia, antisemitism, and censorship in order to argue that Hollywood failed to fulfill the pledge made by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry to provide an essential wartime education for the American public. Fundamentally, Hollywood studio heads (each holding their own Jewish identities) and the Production Code Administration stymied efforts by individual European émigré filmmakers to combat American xenophobia and antisemitism in order to remain in control of a studio system that had avoided serious consideration of Jews or of Jewish issues on screen for at least a decade before news of the Holocaust reached the United States.

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Introduction

“When the plans for the new world are being threshed out at the peace conference, when the sentences are being passed and the guilt fixed and the plums distributed, there will be nothing for the Jews of Europe to say to the delegates around the judgment table but the faint, sad phrase, "Remember us!"¹

—Ben Hecht, 1943

Defining Holocaust Film, 1942-1944

The final scene of Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) is a bold American cry of resistance against the Nazi enemy. Using only their wits and false facial hair, a troupe of Polish actors flees from Nazi-occupied Warsaw to Scotland. Still dressed in Nazi garb, the group stand triumphant as they are interviewed by press. A reporter asks the leading actor of the troupe, “And you, Mr. Tura, you played the real hero in this amazing play?” Tura responds by giving credit to his fellow actors, who stand around him smiling. He jokes about their lack of involvement in the whole endeavor and their faces become serious, but the moment ends quickly by a reporter’s next question. The scene ends with Tura’s wife requesting that, as a reward for his heroic deeds, he play *Hamlet* on Shakespeare’s home stage.² This exchange is predictable; Tura is an incessant ham whose ego is rivaled only by his wife’s. However, Tura is not the man who sacrificed his life so his fellow actors could escape Warsaw. Rather, the film’s comedic relief and sympathetic daydreamer, the implicitly Jewish Greenberg, sacrificed his life for his troupe just moments before they fled to Scotland. From watching this scene alone, there is no hint of the tragedy that has just taken place. Though the word “Jew” is never mentioned in *To Be or Not to Be*, this Jewish hero was the first to become a silent martyr on American screens. His absence in the final scenes of the

¹ Ben Hecht, “The Extermination of the Jews: 1. Remember Us!” *The American Mercury*, published February 1943, accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.unz.com/print/AmMercury-1943feb-00194>.

² 1:31:16, *To Be or Not to Be*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch (United States: United Artists, 1942).

film was director Lubitsch's silent plea, which transcended censorship by the state and Hollywood moguls, to call attention to Hitler's war against European Jewry.

For Jewish Americans in the 1940s, tracing the pattern of genocide occurring in Nazi-occupied nations



Figure 1: Tura and the troupe answer questions in Scotland.

was nearly impossible. Despite newspaper accounts of mass deportations of Jews across Europe, the Jewish annihilation that we now know as the Holocaust was incomprehensible by today's standards. It was through film, particularly those made by Jewish and European émigrés, that Americans would begin to perceive the targets of destruction for Hitler's murder program. Nevertheless, filmmakers intentionally veiled the scope of Jewish suffering. Jewish filmmakers forced audiences to look closely at the screen and find *what*, or more precisely, *who* was missing in the few films featuring Holocaust imagery. The death of Lubitsch's Greenberg, a Jewish hero in a film without the word "Jew," marks the origin of American Holocaust film over thirty years before the American audiences became familiar with "the Holocaust."

The term "Holocaust" is currently used to describe the state-sponsored, systematic process by which European Jewry was persecuted and ultimately annihilated by the Nazi regime, beginning in 1933 and ending in 1945.³ Its first use in association with the European Jewish genocide was in 1942, in a booklet published by the United Aid Committee for the Jews in Poland,

³ For the purposes of this essay, I will be using the term "Holocaust" in line with this definition. I will be using "Final Solution" to denote the later period of the Holocaust, beginning with the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.

yet the term did not become well-known in the United States until the premiere of the 1978 TV mini-series, *Holocaust*.⁴ Despite the controversy it provoked, this television series defined Jewish suffering under the Third Reich in the public imagination. The term was cemented by President Carter's establishment of the President's Commission on the Holocaust within the year.⁵ The influence of American television and cinema on the shaping of patterns of memory surrounding the Holocaust was immense.

With the rise of Holocaust-themed cinema, scholars have debated the definition of a "Holocaust film." Building on Raul Hilberg's definition of the Holocaust, "a step-by-step historical process, beginning with the laws of April 1933...and ending in 1945," historian Judith Doneson defined a "Holocaust film" as any film depicting the "gradual evolution to destruction, as well as the destruction itself, which culminated in the death of six million Jews."⁶ However, as noted by film analyst Aaron Kerner, a Holocaust film need not exclusively focus on Jewish suffering.⁷ Jewish and European émigré filmmakers produced three Holocaust films from 1942 to 1944: Ernst Lubitsch's dark comedy *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), André De Toth's fictional war tribunal drama *None Shall Escape* (1944), and Fred Zinnemann's anti-fascist thriller *The Seventh Cross* (1944). None of these films focused solely on Jewish suffering. Nonetheless, each film contributed to a broader conversation happening in wartime Hollywood about the Jewish plight.

This essay will examine the historical context and particular concerns of each film, as well as the biography of each of the directors, in order to assess the extent to which they succeeded in

⁴ "Holocaust," *Shoah Resource Center: The International School for Holocaust Studies*, Yad Vashem, 1, accessed February 21, 2021, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206419.pdf; Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 2.

⁵ Jon Petrie, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (2000) in Nancy Copeland Halbgewachs, "Censorship and Holocaust Film in the Hollywood Studio System," PhD diss., UNM Digital Repository (University of New Mexico, 2012), 24, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/soc_etds/18.

⁶ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 6.

⁷ Kerner, 4.

drawing the attention of the American public to the plight of European Jewry during World War II. For a film to be considered successful in this goal, it required circumvention of censorship in order to convey the urgency of Jewish suffering abroad, artistic strength as derived from the director's talent, and commercial success among the American filmgoing public, often influenced by film critiques in the print media.

The first film considered here is Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*. Self-producing the film under the aegis of United Artists, German-Jewish émigré Lubitsch directed this dark comedy dealing with the destruction of Poland during the Nazi occupation. Co-written by Lubitsch and Melchior Lengyel, with screenwriter Edwin Justus Mayer, *To Be or Not to Be* follows a well-known Polish theater troupe rehearsing "Gestapo," a satirical play depicting the rank and file of the National Socialist Party. Jack Benny and Carole Lombard play the vain and endlessly bantering husband-and-wife acting duo, Josef and Maria Tura. During their stage run of *Hamlet*, Maria becomes romantically involved with a young and adoring – though slightly fanatical – Air Force lieutenant, Stanislaw Sobinski (Robert Stack), who becomes entangled with the troupe's anti-Nazi farce. After the bombing of Warsaw and subsequent invasion by Nazi forces, Josef and the troupe impersonate German soldiers to sabotage the plans of Nazi spy Professor Siletsky (Stanley Ridges). Maria lures Siletsky and the other Nazi men by feigning interest in their ideology while the theater



Figure 2: Ernst Lubitsch smoking a cigar, 1949

troupe engages in a series of clever charades, outwitting the Nazi enemy and allowing the troupe of Polish actors to escape to Scotland.

While *To Be or Not to Be* took a comedic approach to the defeat of Nazism, André De Toth's *None Shall Escape* (1944) brought Americans into the dramatic setting of a courtroom where justice against the Nazi war criminals was solemnly served. In 1944, Columbia released *None Shall Escape*, which was based on a story written by two European refugees, Alfred Neumann and Joseph Than, and adapted for the screen by Jewish-American screenwriter Lester Cole, who would soon achieve notoriety as one of the Hollywood Ten who refused to give the House Un-American Activities Committee the names of alleged communists in the film industry.⁸ *None Shall Escape* predicts a post-war criminal trial involving witnesses who give testimony against Wilhelm Grimm, a high-ranking Nazi officer and war criminal played by Alexander Knox. With each witness, Grimm's crimes are further revealed. After losing his eye in World War I, Grimm returns to his small Polish village where his betrothed, a Polish schoolteacher named Marja (Marsha Hunt), awaits him. Marja is repulsed by his change in character, a consequence of his wartime wounds, and cancels their wedding, sending him into a fury.

He molests a young girl (Shirley Mills), who later kills herself, but the criminal court cannot produce enough evidence to convict him of this crime. Grimm flees to Munich, where he reunites with his anti-fascist brother, Karl (Erik Rolf). Despite his



Figure 3: André De Toth, date unknown

brother's kindness, Grimm turns him in to Nazi authorities. As the Second World War begins, Grimm returns to Lidzbark as a commanding officer with his nephew Willie (Richard Crane) at

⁸ *None Shall Escape*, directed by André De Toth (United States: Columbia Pictures, 1944).

his side. Grimm organizes a large-scale deportation of Jews from Lidzbark which leads to a mass shooting. Willie, who has become enamored with the young Janina, Marja's daughter, is stunned to find out Grimm has ordered her into Gestapo-enforced prostitution. After she is shot in the Officer's Club, Willie renounces his Nazism and demands to pray at her side for his sins against his family. Grimm kills him during his prayer. In the final court scene, Grimm rejects the international court's authority in a violent outburst.

Much like *None Shall Escape*, Austrian-born Fred Zinnemann's 1944 film *The Seventh Cross* follows a German exile on-the-run from his past. However, Wilhelm Grimm's character is the opposite of Zinnemann's German protagonist, George Heisler. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer advertised *The Seventh Cross* as a star-vehicle for Spencer Tracy, who played concentration camp escapee George Heisler.⁹ The film is based on German-Jewish author Anna Seghers' novel, *Das siebte Kreuz* (1942), and directed by Zinnemann, who had emigrated to the United States from Berlin in 1929.¹⁰ It begins in the fictitious German concentration camp of Westhofen, where the *commandant* has erected large wooden crosses for each of seven escaped prisoners. Ernest Mullau (Ray Collins), the first to be captured, narrates George's escape through the countryside and into a small town where he watches the other prisoners get caught by Nazi soldiers. He returns to the home of his girlfriend, Leni (Kaaren Verne), who rejects his pleas for asylum. As he continues to flee, Heisler receives clothes from a nearby costume shopkeeper while another escapee jumps to his death just outside. Finally, Heisler visits an old friend, Paul Roeder (Hume Cronyn), who offers his underground connections in order to save Heisler's life. The compassion of others, particularly

⁹ J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 30.

¹⁰ *The Seventh Cross*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Culver City: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944).



Figure 4: Fred Zinnemann, c. 1940

waitress Toni (Signe Hasso), leads Heisler to regain his humanity and escape from Germany via boat.

These three films were the only major motion pictures that fall within the definition of “Holocaust films” during this time frame. The differentiating factor between films from 1939-1941 and 1942-1944 was the specifically Jewish character of the American fight against Nazism in the latter years. A prime example of early anti-Nazi sentiment was Warner Bros.’ *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*

(1939). This quasi-documentary revealed to Americans a Nazi fifth column in their country, without mentioning the Jewish predicament once. Despite the early reports of Nazi persecution against Jews, such as the *New York Times*’ front-page coverage of *Kristallnacht*, filmmakers remained unaware or unconvinced of the urgency to alert the public about the rapidly deteriorating Jewish situation in Europe.¹¹ Film historian Judith Doneson argued that *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* may have actually furthered anti-refugee sentiments by suggesting the dangers German refugees posed to American society, thus skewing the public imagination’s perspective on accepting Jewish refugees from Germany.¹²

Prior to 1942, anti-Nazism had not yet merged with advocacy for Jewish rescue in Hollywood. Furthermore, Hollywood filmmakers had not yet publicly pledged themselves to any war-related causes because of the United States’ neutral stance in World War II. This changed when the United

¹¹ Peter Novick, “The War Years,” in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 21-22, Internet Archive, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/embed/holocaustinameri00novi>. *Kristallnacht*, also known as the “Night of Broken Glass,” refers to violent anti-Jewish pogroms that took place on November 9 and 10, 1938 throughout Germany, Austria, and German-occupied areas of Czechoslovakia.

¹² Doneson, 31.

States declared war on Japan after Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces conducted an aerial assault on Pearl Harbor, an American military base on the Hawaiian island Oahu. This unprovoked attack brought the United States into the war and mobilized the American film industry to contribute to the war effort. The *Motion Picture Committee Co-operating for National Defense* renamed itself as the *War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry* (WAC) after the attack on Pearl Harbor and tasked itself with “informing the American people with regard to vital aspects of the defense effort.”¹³

After the re-establishment of the WAC at the end of 1941, Hollywood’s self-perceived responsibility to educate the American public increased; however, it did not expand to include education on the Jewish genocide taking place overseas. Between 1942 and 1944, Americans had access to press coverage of Nazi atrocities, supplemented by Hollywood depictions of the European warzones, yet the images portrayed by these institutions were not enough to illustrate accurately the war crimes happening against Jews across the continent. The first press coverage of the Final Solution in the West came from a report by the Jewish Bund out of the Warsaw Ghetto in June 1942. The report detailed the mass murder of 700,000 Soviet Jews by Nazi forces and included the first mention of killings by gas. It prompted the Polish government-in-exile and five other national bodies to alert the Allied powers and the Pope to the killings. In the United States, the news received a single column in the Jewish-owned *New York Times* on July 2, 1942.¹⁴ Press coverage skimmed over instances like these because the public lacked interest in crimes against Jews during an overwhelming international conflict, and because no less a figure than the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh and his America First organization were warning against American

¹³ K.R.M. Short, “Washington’s Information Manual for Hollywood, 1942,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 171.

¹⁴ Dawidowicz, Lucy S. "American Jews and The Holocaust." *The New York Times*. April 18, 1982. Accessed November 1, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/magazine/american-jews-and-the-holocaust.html>

involvement in the war on behalf of the Jews.¹⁵ The filmmaking industry however, avoided the question of Jewish representation in films because of its Jewish leadership, who were known as “movie moguls,” and the predominantly Catholic leadership of the Production Code Administration.

The films *To Be or Not to Be*, *None Shall Escape*, and *The Seventh Cross* reflect the most intentional efforts within the American film industry to advocate for American intervention in the European Jewish genocide. In addition to these films, veteran screenwriter Ben Hecht’s *We Will Never Die* pageant (1943), first performed on stage in Madison Square Garden, was another milestone in the film industry’s fight against Nazism. Through historical analysis of these Holocaust productions, made between 1942 and 1944, this essay argues that Hollywood failed to fulfill the pledge made by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry to provide an essential wartime education for the American public. Fundamentally, Hollywood studio heads and the Production Code Administration stymied efforts by individual European émigré filmmakers to combat American xenophobia and antisemitism in order to remain in control of a studio system that had avoided serious consideration of Jews or of Jewish images on screen for at least a decade before the news of the Holocaust reached the United States.

Historiography Review

This paper seeks to build on the vast discourse of two subjects: Holocaust film and American complicity in the Holocaust. This essay seeks to reassess the existing literature by defining Holocaust films during a time when “the Holocaust” itself had not yet been defined. By analyzing motion pictures created principally by Jewish and European émigrés, I am building on

¹⁵ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 187.

Judith Doneson's definition of Holocaust film and utilizing the *auteur* theory to deliver a deeper analysis of these films. As defined by film critic Andrew Sarris, the *auteur* theory relies on "the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value."¹⁶ With it, one can deduce the relationship between a director's personality and their work. While Sarris is clear that the *auteur* theory does not project the director's attitude toward the world, he claims it reveals the "élan of the soul" – how the core tenets of a filmmaker's identity impacts their work.¹⁷ Using the basic premises of this theory (technique, personal style, and interior meaning), this essay will discuss how each director's Jewishness and immigration experiences influenced his work in Hollywood during the war, when the grim news of the fate of the European Jews was just beginning to become known in the United States.

Before discussing the film-focused scholarship, this section will address the major historiographical arguments pertaining to the United States during the Holocaust, in order to introduce historical context. The general consensus among scholars is that the Roosevelt administration failed to take action on behalf of European Jews during the Holocaust, while also charging the press with its failure to attract public support. The leading authors in this field are historians David Wyman, Lucy Dawidowicz, Raphael Medoff, and Richard Breitman. In what is widely considered to be the definitive work on the subject, Wyman's *Abandonment of the Jews* (2007) examines the conflicting forces at play during Hitler's reign and condemns the United States' inaction for the loss of potentially thousands of lives, due to disunity, weak leadership, and passivity in the face of catastrophe.¹⁸ H.L. Feingold's *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Reacted to the Holocaust* (1995) takes a more moderate approach than Wyman to American

¹⁶ Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 516.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 517.

¹⁸ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

complicity in the Holocaust, diverging from Wyman with his conclusion that any other path of action would have been impossible.¹⁹ Another primary voice in the field, Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz, examines the actions taken by the American Jewish community to aid European Jews. Her essay in response to *Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die*, Lawrence Jarvik's 1982 documentary film, claims that Jarvik's critique of the American Jewish community's alleged apathy is "at once laughable and outrageous."²⁰ She traces the actions of various Jewish groups, from the benevolent Joint Distribution Committee to a small group of Palestinian militants. Finally, Raphael Medoff's *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* (2020) blames Roosevelt's indifference for the American failure to intervene, yet shifts partial guilt onto FDR's ardent supporter and New York Jewish leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise.²¹ The most recent contribution to this fraught subject, Richard Breitman and Alan Lichtman's *FDR and the Jews* (2013) also takes a more moderate position than Wyman's indictment of the Roosevelt administration did forty years ago.²² This essay will offer another perspective on the problem of America's failure to address the Holocaust as it was unfolding. By limiting its scope to Hollywood's political action, then further concentrating on the works of four Jewish and European immigrant filmmakers during the time, this essay will illuminate the relationship between émigré filmmakers and Hollywood's treatment of the Holocaust.

Scholars have yet to examine *To Be or Not to Be*, *None Shall Escape*, and *The Seventh Cross* as primary case studies in Holocaust filmmaking during this time period. While Lubitsch's

¹⁹ H. L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Dawidowicz, "American Jews and the Holocaust."

²¹ Rafael Medoff, *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* (Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society of America, University of Nebraska Press, 2020), accessed October 29, 2020, Muse, muse.jhu.edu/book/66716.

²² Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

To Be or Not to Be is arguably one of the most controversial works produced during this time, it often receives short shrift amongst his great compendium of films. Biographers Scott Eyman and Joseph McBride (in their respective works) provide well-rounded perspectives on the making and reception of the film, contextualizing its production within American historical events of the period, recalling lively anecdotes about the making of the film, and bringing the director's Jewish-German background to the forefront of their analysis. However, Herman Weinberg's *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study* (1968), considered the primary work on Lubitsch's career, falls short with its analysis of *To Be or Not to Be* by reducing it to a mere plot summary.²³ Outside of biographies, scholarship on *To Be or Not to Be* amongst Holocaust researchers is lacking. Judith Doneson, author of the defining work on Holocaust film as history, and Aaron Kerner, film researcher and author of *Film and the Holocaust* (2011), each devote very little of their in-depth surveys to Lubitsch. Doneson's treatment of *The Seventh Cross* is relegated to a single mention, and *None Shall Escape* is omitted from both works entirely.²⁴ Considering the corpus of Holocaust film today, these three films are overshadowed by those in later periods, or those dealing specifically with antisemitism, which is likely why neither Doneson nor Kerner examine them closely.

In contrast with *To Be or Not to Be*, authors of Jewish history have given significantly less attention to *The Seventh Cross* and *None Shall Escape*. Instead, film scholars examine them as war movies and review them in isolation from their Jewish origins. Works on Zinnemann, such as *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (2009), focus on his

²³ Herman G. Weinberg, *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study* (New York: Dutton, 1968).

²⁴ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

exceptional film noir *An Act of Violence* (1949) and view *The Seventh Cross* as a transitional film.²⁵ Others, including E.J. Smyth's *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (2014) and Neil Sinyard's *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience* (2003), interpret *The Seventh Cross* as a lesser precursor to his 1948 refugee drama, *The Search*.²⁶

Unlike works on Zinnemann, scholarly works on André De Toth and Lester Cole's *None Shall Escape* provide little cinematic history to support their film critiques. Likely because of the film's flawed approach to the Nazi threat, it has been ignored throughout the historiography. Studies of Lester Cole, the film's screenwriter and one of the "Hollywood Ten," are overtaken by commentary on his Communist politics, leaving little else to review but his autobiography, *Hollywood Red* (1981).²⁷ Director De Toth, known for his 3D cinematic work, *House of Wax* (1953), also evades historiographic discussion. These filmmakers and their "Holocaust films" will serve as primary case studies to discuss Jewishness and immigration as socio-political forces within the United States from 1942 to 1944.

This project is exceptional in the historiography because it draws upon the personal experiences and identities of the principal filmmakers. If not for their immigration to the United States, all of these filmmakers would likely have fallen victim to Hitler's regime. This analysis emphasizes the distinctively Jewish and European-emigrant perspectives of these filmmakers, which enabled them to reject or evade the anodyne complacency of the PCA and the Roosevelt administration. Hollywood filmmakers held the power to influence American culture. Before and

²⁵ Vincent Brook, "Pathological Noir, Populist Noir, and an Act of Violence: John Brahm, Anatole Litvak, Fred Zinnemann," in *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

²⁶ J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014) accessed October 12, 2020, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkm26>; Neil Sinyard, "A Worm's Eye View of Hollywood, 1929-1948," in *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2003).

²⁷ Lester Cole, *Hollywood Red: The Autobiography of Lester Cole* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1981) accessed November 19, 2020, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/hollywoodredauto00cole/page/n5/mode/2up>.

during the Holocaust, powerful yet cautious Jewish studio heads presided over the industry, working with the PCA to keep Jewish suffering out of their motion pictures. With the entrance of European filmmakers into the American realm and the decline of Roosevelt's New Deal ethos, Hollywood itself transformed as well. To meet the demand for activism on behalf of Europe's Jews, thousands of American film industry leaders mobilized to form the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, while others produced an exceptional public pageant, uninhibited by Production Code censorship and studio constraints.

Disunity Among Defenders of European Jewry

“What is happening in Germany today may happen tomorrow in another land on earth unless it is being challenged and rebuked.... We must speak out.”²⁸

—Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, March 1933

FDR and Hollywood

In the 1930s, Hollywood moguls and filmmakers alike embraced President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, taking it upon themselves to deliver an innocuous version of liberalism to American audiences via the silver screen. Filmmakers in Hollywood and the censors at the Production Code Administration aligned themselves with the New Deal, a program of “social reconstruction that would introduce to America the ideas and values of a welfare society, and active state benevolence and intervention,” and in doing so fostered a close relationship among the three parties.²⁹ Throughout the decade, Hollywood maintained this alliance and rose to a position of cultural leadership within the United States.³⁰ If any cultural institution was well-positioned to inform the American public about Hitler’s war against European Jews during this time, it was the motion picture industry.

On September 1, 1939, Germany declared war on Poland. Prior to Hitler’s implementation of his vision of *Lebensraum* for Germany, an expansionist policy that sought to create a Nazi Empire in Eastern Europe, the United States had little reason to concern itself with the antisemitic racial laws enacted in Germany and Austria. However, with the declaration of war and the *Wehrmacht*’s entrance into Poland, it was obvious that the lives of Polish Jews were at stake. After the conclusion of the Polish campaign, on October 7, 1939, the *Reichsführer*-SS and Reich

²⁸ “Americans and the Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed February 14, 2021, <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main>.

²⁹ Nicholas Smedley, *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011), 7, 54.

³⁰ Smedley, 49.

Commissar for the Consolidation of Germandom, Heinrich Himmler, began building the “new racial order in Europe” by deporting Poles and Jews from newly annexed German territories. German security forces carried out brutal deportations of Jews from their homes, shooting hostages to maintain their dominance, and after the military action ended, “mass shootings of civilians became common and tens of thousands of Poles and Jews were killed.”³¹ On January 20, 1942, a group of Nazi leaders met at Wannsee Lake in a suburban district of Berlin to discuss Europe’s “Jewish Question.” Here, without Hitler present, Nazi administrators endorsed the Reich Main Security Office chief Reinhard Heydrich's plan to annihilate European Jewry through systematic mass murder. Just two months prior, the United States had entered the war – yet the Roosevelt administration remained silent as the Nazi leaders began to carry out their plan for the extermination of the Jews.

The divisions between interventionists and isolationists kept the American government immobilized when it came to the global conflict until the attack on Pearl Harbor.³² With America’s belated entrance to the conflict, most of the Hollywood chiefs abandoned their optimism and their close association with FDR, watching passively as the resurgent Republican Party attacked the New Deal’s principles and policies. Nevertheless, a select few of them took a controversial stance of advocacy in the European war against fascism.³³

The Keepers of American Values

The War Activities Committee (WAC) pushed Hollywood to serve the Roosevelt administration’s priorities during wartime through their unique means. Headquartered in

³¹ Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 99-101; Dawidowicz, “American Jews and the Holocaust.”

³² Smedley, 33.

³³ Smedley, 8.

Hollywood and New York, the Federal Government tasked the WAC with “informing the American people with regard to vital aspects of the defense effort.”³⁴ The Committee included both political and industry figures, such as Lowell Mellett, who served as the Coordinator of Government Films and as Roosevelt’s personal assistant, and Francis S. Harmon, who served as the day-to-day head of WAC operations and as the executive assistant to national film censor Will H. Hays of the MPPDA.³⁵ With the committee newly fixated on America’s involvement in the war, the WAC produced a “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry” in June 1942, to define the film industry’s commitment to the war effort. Building on a Congressional address made by President Roosevelt on January 6, 1942, the document was organized into six categories: “The Issues, The Enemy, The United Nations and Peoples, Work and Production, The Home Front, and The Fighting Forces.”³⁶ Notable in the overarching discussion of the Nazi program to destroy European Jewry, is the following passage:

The power, cruelty, treachery and complete cynicism of the enemy should be pictured but it is dangerous to try to picture that all Germans, all Italians and all Japanese are bestial barbarians. The people know that this is not true. They will resent efforts to mislead them. Those who are deceived by such misrepresentation will later direct their resentment at those leaders who have deceived them and will follow false prophets who have exposed such duplicity.³⁷

This caveat offered by the WAC provided the basis for a fair perspective on approaching the Nazi threat, long before there was widespread understanding of the Nazis' gruesome crimes against humanity. Additionally, for the German population living in the United States, a villainizing approach to the German people as a whole might undermine national spirit. However, this play-it-safe attitude toward Germany did not last. Beginning in 1939 with the Warner Bros.' *Confessions*

³⁴ K.R.M. Short, “Washington’s Information Manual for Hollywood, 1942,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 171.

³⁵ Short, 171.

³⁶ Short, 174.

³⁷ Short, 176.

of a Nazi Spy, Nazism hit the big screen as a distinctly German evil that threatened American sovereignty and democracy.

Warner Bros. proudly acted against the Nazi threat as early as 1933, by cutting off business ties with Germany while other studios (MGM, Paramount, RKO, and Twentieth Century-Fox) did not. This decision came after the back-alley murder by “Nazi thugs” of Phil Kaufman, Warner Bros.’ Berlin branch manager.³⁸ Looking back on the incident thirty years later, Jack Warner wrote, “Like many an outnumbered Jew he was trapped in an alley. They hit him with fists and clubs and then kicked the life out of him with their boots and left him dying there.”³⁹ The Warner Bros.’ first notable anti-Nazi film premiered six years later, after the groundbreaking discovery and destruction of a Nazi fifth column in New York.⁴⁰

In June 1938, a federal trial convicted eighteen individuals, including prominent Nazi officials, “on charges of conspiracy to steal military codes from the U.S. armed forces.”⁴¹ During the trial, Warner Bros. sent screenwriter Milton Krims to follow the story for a potential motion picture project. Despite resistance from Dr. Georg Gyssling, the German consul in Los Angeles, the PCA approved the film’s contents and Warner Bros. produced the



Figure 5: 1939 promotional poster

³⁸ Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 312-314.

³⁹ Colin Shindler, *Hollywood Goes to War: Films and American Society, 1939-1952* (London; Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1979), 9.

⁴⁰ The “fifth column” refers to a German spy ring acting within the United States.

⁴¹ Doherty, 335.

approved script. Joseph Breen, head of the PCA, stated in relation to the script, “[T]he nation involved—Germany—seems to be represented honestly and without fraud or misrepresentation, and the ‘institutions, prominent people, and citizenry’ of the nation represented ‘fairly.’”⁴² The film, and its approval by the PCA, signaled to the film industry that provocation of Nazi Germany, if supported by credible evidence, was allowed.⁴³

While Hollywood began to take on the Nazis, audiences remained apathetic towards their screen presence. According to a 1941 report, “In 194 separate surveys made by Dr. George Gallup, it was found that only New York audiences seemed to want pictures with political content involving Hitler and the Nazis.”⁴⁴ The conflict in Europe was still too far removed from the American imagination for films involving the Third Reich to be successful, either in Hollywood or in the rest of the nation. This did not mean the film industry ignored the issue; in fact, numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish Hollywood personalities devoted their off-screen hours to the cause of anti-Nazism, beginning in 1934.

Despite industry-wide silence on Hitler’s crimes against German and Austrian Jews in the pre-war years, Hollywood celebrities and leaders distinguished themselves as defenders of European Jewry through off-screen political organizations and timely stage productions. In 1934, the first Hollywood anti-Nazi group arose: the Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee (LAJCC). Funded by Jewish Hollywood executives, the LAJCC successfully infiltrated the German American Bund and other pro-Nazi organizations, collecting information that served in

⁴² Doherty, 337.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), 326-327, in Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 31.

the fight against domestic Nazism.⁴⁵ While the studio heads and several dozen Hollywood personalities donated their wealth and influence to the LAJCC's cause, another anti-Nazi organization would garner the membership of thousands of Hollywood names: the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League for the Defense of American Democracy (HANL).

HANL, founded in 1936, became the most prominent anti-Nazi coalition to arise in Hollywood. With the shared understanding that "Nazism was not a distant menace but a clear and present danger," this Popular Front group combined New Deal Democratic ideals with the prestige and wealth of diverse Hollywood screenwriters, actors, and industry workers.⁴⁶ Donald Ogden Stewart, an A-list screenwriter, headed the organization and within two years garnered over five thousand members.⁴⁷ Although every other Hollywood studio remained closed to political intervention, Warner Bros. supported HANL with access to their radio stations. On November 18, 1938, directly after *Kristallnacht*, over 3,500 motion picture industry personnel assembled in protest at a "Quarantine Hitler" rally.⁴⁸ The rally took place at the Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles, bringing prominent voices such as director Frank Capra, actress Joan Crawford, and German émigré novelist Thomas Mann to the forefront of the increasingly public anti-Nazi movement.⁴⁹ The next month, HANL released a petition for America to sever



Figure 6: Representatives from the Committee of 56 sign the Declaration of Democratic Independence, 1938

⁴⁵ Laura Rosenzweig, *Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 4-7, 54.

⁴⁶ Doherty, 96-99.

⁴⁷ Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 206.

⁴⁸ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*, 99.

⁴⁹ Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*, 210.

economic ties with Germany. The “Committee of 56,” which included stars such as Henry Fonda, Groucho Marx, Paul Muni, Claude Rains, and Edward G. Robinson, held a photogenic signing of the petition. For the first time in the U.S., the issue was covered by newsreels, including Fox Movietone, Universal Newsreel, and MGM’s News of the Day.⁵⁰ But despite the attention garnered by HANL’s work, the majority of Hollywood leaders refused to touch the issue of Jewish rescue from Nazism.

The influence of Jewish movie moguls made little difference in advocacy efforts for the rescue of European Jewry to American audiences. With credit given to the minority involved in HANL and to the Warner Bros. production company, most industry leaders avoided Jewish issues because they did not want to call attention to their own Jewish identities. However, outside of the film industry, American Jewish organizations fought to combat Nazism through their own (though lesser) means. Working at the same time as their anti-Nazi counterparts in Hollywood, influential Jewish organizations and film industry advocacy groups clashed.

The Race to Madison Square Garden

For Rabbi Stephen J. Wise (1874-1949) and veteran scriptwriter Ben Hecht (1894-1964), the plight of European Jews required immediate action that the film industry alone could not provide. These two men, diametrically opposed in their Jewish identities and political beliefs, raced against each other to garner support for separate Madison Square Garden rallies. Without the hurdles of a censorship board to jump through, both Wise and Hecht curated public demonstrations to convince Americans of their shared cause. In March of 1943, it was Hecht who produced a massive and memorable pageant, titled “We Will Never Die,” which toured the United

⁵⁰ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*, 120-1.

States performing on behalf of European Jewry and anti-Nazism. These two 1943 demonstrations reveal the dissonance between anti-Nazi groups in the film industry and in the larger Jewish-American public sphere, who, despite their common goal, insisted on acting separately.

Stephen Wise was born in Hungary in 1874 and brought to the United States as a toddler. As the son of Rabbi Aaron Wise, a founding member of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and a student of what he called “Liberal Judaism,” Stephen Wise rose to prominence in the American Jewish community as a change-maker. In 1918, Wise founded the American Jewish Congress (AJC) alongside other Jewish notables.⁵¹ As Ben Hecht cynically observed in hindsight, by the 1930s Rabbi Wise served as the “head of the Jews of New York, head of the Zionists and, ... head of almost everything noble in American Jewry.”⁵² However, it was Wise’s relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt that solidified his status as the most influential Jewish leader with access to the political sphere during the time of Hitler’s rise. Wise eagerly praised FDR and the New Deal, yet his enthusiasm faltered as the president failed to address the alarming reports that were detailing crimes against European Jews.⁵³

In February 1933, the three leaders of the largest public organizations in defense of Jewish identity in the US, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and B’nai B’rith, met to discuss the crisis. A large percentage of their members were German-born Jews, who pressured the conferees to avoid a path of public protest that might humiliate German-Americans. Instead, they adopted a cautious approach; Hitler’s movements remained unpredictable and the decision to protest in the US might incite repercussions against German Jews. Together, they created a “Joint Consultative Committee” for surveillance of the issue, with no intent to instigate

⁵¹ Rafael Medoff, *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* (Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society of America, University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 2-3, Muse, muse.jhu.edu/book/66716.

⁵² Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (Simon & Schuster, 1954), 564.

⁵³ Medoff, 4.

public action.⁵⁴ Unlike the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith leaders, Wise conceded that the pressure was rising for public demonstrations, writing to a colleague, "You cannot imagine what I am doing to resist the masses. They want organized boycotts. They want tremendous street scenes."⁵⁵ Against Wise's protestations, the American Jewish Congress reopened discussion over holding such a demonstration less than a month later.

On March 19, 1933, the AJC brought together some fifteen hundred representatives from American Jewish organizations, fully intent on planning anti-Hitler protests. Shortly after Hitler's inauguration in January, American Jews flooded the offices of the AJC with phone calls and letters, demanding they intervene publicly on behalf of the imperiled Jews of Europe. In his opening statement at the conference, AJC president Bernard Deutsch addressed the concerns of his constituents by vowing to take "responsible, vigorous, orderly and effective action" on their behalf.⁵⁶ This action took the form of a "Stop Hitler Now" rally at Madison Square Garden on March 27, despite continued protestations by the American Jewish Committee who feared provoking antisemitism in the US and triggering violent consequences for German Jews. Yet, in front of an audience of twenty thousand, with another thirty-five thousand listening in from loudspeakers surrounding the stadium, political figures stood alongside prominent Jewish and Christian leaders to publicly denounce the mistreatment of Jews under Hitler's reign. For Wise, non-Jewish speakers gave legitimacy to the endeavor; he chose to air only Christian voices on NBC Radio that night, to avoid what might otherwise have appeared to be a narrowly Jewish plea.⁵⁷ The rally certainly reached beyond the American Jewish community. Two days later, Hitler demonstrated his command over the German national economy by announcing a one-day national

⁵⁴ Medoff, 6-7.

⁵⁵ Medoff, 8.

⁵⁶ Medoff, 9-10.

⁵⁷ Medoff, 12.

boycott against all Jewish businesses on April 1, which would continue three days later unless foreign protests ceased. Wise, after speaking with Undersecretary Phillips at the State Department, agreed to a brief silence on the matter.⁵⁸

After this initial rally from the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish leadership significantly withdrew their voices from the public arena. Ten years later, in 1943, Wise revived “Stop Hitler Now,” after Allied leadership confirmed the mass murder of two million European Jews in late 1942.⁵⁹ In a nation preoccupied with war, the rally could only garner attention from the Roosevelt administration if backed by public interest. A Gallup poll taken in January 1943 measured such interest, asking Americans: “It is said that two million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began. Do you think this is true or just a rumor?” Only 47 percent of respondents believed the news as truth, while others dismissed the claims as rumor or had no opinion.⁶⁰ Indifference and ignorance prevailed in the US, as the news media and the Roosevelt administration failed to publicize the Nazi genocide as a critical issue. While the lack of public support may have dissuaded the American Jewish Congress, pressure to act rose as AJC leaders heard rumors that the Bergsonites, a small American branch of the Palestinian-Jewish ultramilitant Zionist group, the Irgun, were planning their own public demonstration. This pressure only multiplied with the release of another press report detailing the intensification of Hitler’s genocide program, including details about a single death camp in Poland murdering six thousand Jews each day.⁶¹ Wise and the American Jewish Congress booked Madison Square Garden for March 1, the

⁵⁸ Medoff, 17.

⁵⁹ The Allied statement, made on December 17 by the United Kingdom, the United States, and Soviet governments, condemned “in the strongest possible terms [Hitler’s] bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination.” A transcript of British PM Anthony Eden reading the statement can be found here: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/dec/17/united-nations-declaration#S5CV0385P0_19421217_HOC_280

⁶⁰ David Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 79, <https://archive.org/details/abandonmentofjew1998wyma/mode/2up>.

⁶¹ Medoff, 149.

day before the oppositional rally was set to take place. To avoid being upstaged, Wise called Ben Hecht, leader of the other pageant, and advised that he cease the production and his own involvement in the “Jewish cause.”⁶² In return, Hecht offered to merge the two demonstrations, but Wise turned him down.⁶³ Wise’s refusal of his offer only energized Hecht.

Ben Hecht and the Bergson Boys

“What would happen if these brilliant Jews cried out with passion against the German butchers? If these socially and artistically celebrated Jews spoke up in rage at the murder of their people! How they could dramatize the German crime! How loudly they could present the nightmare to America and the world!”⁶⁴

—Ben Hecht

In his own words, after Hitler’s invasion of Poland in 1939, Ben Hecht “became a Jew.”⁶⁵ Born in 1897 to Russian-Jewish immigrants Joseph and Sarah Hecht, Hecht grew up in a Yiddish-speaking household and frequented Yiddish theaters where his *Tante* Lubi performed.⁶⁶ Hecht dropped out of the University of Wisconsin after three days there and moved to Chicago. By a stroke of luck, Hecht began reporting for the *Chicago Daily Journal* within a week. He sought out cases of crime and corruption in Chicago and, in 1918, arrived in Berlin to report on postwar goings-on. This trip (his sole trip to Germany) revealed to him the realities of protest and violence; he witnessed the Spartacist Revolution firsthand, which biographer Adina Hoffman labeled as his “crash course in human depravity.”⁶⁷ In 1924, Hecht moved to New York with his second wife,

⁶² Hecht, 564.

⁶³ Medoff, 149.

⁶⁴ Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (Simon & Schuster, 1954), 551.

⁶⁵ Adina Hoffman, *Ben Hecht: Fighting Words, Moving Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 3.

⁶⁶ He grew up in many households, actually. The Hecht family lived in New York, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia, before settling in Racine, Wisconsin (Hoffman, 12-14). *Tante* is Yiddish for aunt.

⁶⁷ Hoffman, 18-21, 44-45.

Rose Caylor, who deeply connected with her Jewish identity.⁶⁸ Here, his career as a playwright flourished and he reconnected with his Jewishness for the first time.⁶⁹

While Hoffman suggests that “Hecht’s Americanness was arguably his true religion,” Hecht became a prominent and reputable force within the secular Jewish world in the fight against Hitler.⁷⁰ In the early years of the war, while working for the New York newspaper *P.M.* as a daily columnist, Hecht reported on the “incredible silence of New York’s Jews” around the massacre occurring in Europe.⁷¹ His column, titled “My Tribe Is Called Israel,” garnered the attention of Hillel Kook, known in the United States as Peter H. Bergson (1915-2001), an emissary of the Irgun.⁷² Labeled by historian Lucy Dawidowicz as the “most serious disturbers of American Jewish solidarity,” the Irgun Zvai Leumi separated from the Palestinian Jewish settlement’s defense sector, Haganah, to advance their Zionist-Revisionist ideals.⁷³ In late 1941, Bergson and his small group of Irgunists politicking in the United States invited Hecht to join their cause to raise support for a Jewish army to fight against Hitler. Though initially skeptical, Hecht emerged from their talks in December as the co-chairman of the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, hoping to “help make a little more impressive the older and simpler title – Jew.”⁷⁴

While Hecht now wore the term “Jew” proudly, his colleagues in the film industry did not. The “movie chieftains,” as he described them, “nearly all Jews,” protested against his published

⁶⁸ Hoffman, 49.

⁶⁹ Hoffman, 73.

⁷⁰ Hoffman, 3.

⁷¹ Hecht, 520.

⁷² Bergson was born in Lithuania, under the name Hillel Kook. He committed his life in Palestine to the ideologue Ze’ev Jabotinsky, an intellectual and philosophical leader for the cause of national Jewish liberation. When he arrived in the US in 1940, he adopted the alias that would remain in infamy long after his passing (Hoffman, 130).

⁷³ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “American Jews and The Holocaust,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1982, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/magazine/american-jews-and-the-holocaust.html>.

⁷⁴ Hoffman, 130-133; Monty Penkower, “In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys,” *American Jewish History* 70, no. 3 (March 1, 1981), 284-285.

pleas for attention to the Jewish genocide.⁷⁵ *Reader's Digest Magazine* broke the silence by printing Hecht's article, "Remember Us," which built upon Dr. Hayim Greenberg's fragmentary documentation of the shocking and appalling crimes against Europe's Jews, made up of eyewitness accounts and underground sources.⁷⁶ Inspired by his own work, Hecht assembled thirty famous Jewish playwrights and novelists, and one composer, at playwright George S. Kaufman's home in early 1943. In his own words, these individuals "could command the press of the world."⁷⁷ After Hecht's passionate appeal for this influential crowd to take collective action on behalf of Europe's Jews, half of them left without a word. Fortunately, two guests stayed; Kaufman's collaborator Moss Hart and exiled German composer Kurt Weill, and another, impresario Billy Rose, joined shortly thereafter.⁷⁸ Intent on producing a stage production grand enough to convince the minds of Americans of the urgency of their cause, the rescue of European Jews from annihilation, they addressed the problem of funding. Hecht suggested Bergson and the Committee (on which he sat as co-chair) as a potential avenue for funds, but Moss Hart rejected the "partisan Palestinian group" outright.⁷⁹ Despite an unclear path, Hecht urgently set to writing, and Weill to composing, the production set to premiere at the beginning of the next month, titled "We Will Never Die."

Aided by the Bergsonites' social connections, Hecht, Weill, and Rose pitched the Jewish production to a new demographic in early February: "Jewish presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries...They represented thirty-two Jewish organizations ranging from the powerful B'nai B'rith to a society of Brooklyn rabbis."⁸⁰ Hecht read excerpts from the production's script while Weill accompanied him on the piano, and when finished, the men asked if all organizations present

⁷⁵ Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (Simon & Schuster, 1954), 520.

⁷⁶ Penkower, 288; Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 551; Hecht, "The Extermination of the Jews: 1. Remember Us!"

⁷⁷ Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 548-551.

⁷⁸ An impresario is the stage version of a film producer. They organize, and often finance, plays, operas, or concerts.

⁷⁹ Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 553.

⁸⁰ Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 554.

would lend their support simply by placing their organizations' names on the same letterhead as an endorsement of the pageant. This request, as Hecht recalled it, caused the room to "erupt into a free-for-all, bitter as a Kentucky feud ... The thirty-two Jewish organizations were denouncing each other as Socialists, as Fascists, as Christians, as undesirables of every stripe."⁸¹ Nevertheless, the band of Broadway propagandists continued their intense preparations for the production without the financial support of the Jewish organizations of New York. During preparations, which involved convincing "a hundred" rabbis to join their cause and uncovering a secret pact between Great Britain and the United States to keep Jews from immigrating to Palestine, Hecht received the previously mentioned telephone call from Rabbi Wise.⁸² Neither party was willing to cancel their event and on March 1, 1943, Wise's second "Stop Hitler Now" rally took place.

Competing Rallies for the Jewish Cause

The American Jewish Congress rally filled twenty-one thousand seats in Madison Square Garden, with ten thousand more outside the gates. "The American Jewish Congress, the Church Peace Union, the Free World Association, American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations and other Christian and Jewish bodies," some of whom had likely turned Hecht down a month earlier, provided funding and support for the production.⁸³ The production featured prominent non-Jewish speakers, including the AFL president William Green and New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, alongside Rabbi Wise and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 556; Hoffman, 145-146.

⁸² Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 574-575.

⁸³ "SAVE DOOMED JEWS, HUGE RALLY PLEADS; United Nations Must Halt Nazi Murders Now, Leaders Tell 21,000 at the Garden Huge Rally Demands Rescue of Doomed Jews," *The New York Times*, March 2, 1943, accessed October 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1943/03/02/archives/save-doomed-jews-huge-rally-pleads-united-nations-must-halt-nazi.html?searchResultPosition=68>; Wyman, 88.

⁸⁴ Wyman, 88.

They adopted a joint resolution, introduced by Louis Lipsky of the AJC, which proposed an eleven-point plan of action for President Roosevelt to rescue European Jews.⁸⁵ This plan led to the revival of the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs on March 15, which, in the following twelve weeks of activity, could not overcome its ideological divisions or unite behind a single leader to impact the Roosevelt administration's approach.⁸⁶ The "Stop Hitler Now" rally, despite its solemn portrayal of the grave situation in Europe, "couldn't hold a theatrical candle to the flamboyantly spectacular" production that took place the next week.⁸⁷

The thousand-member cast of "We Will Never Die" performed twice on the evening of March 9 for two separate audiences totaling forty thousand, the largest Madison Square Garden had ever seen.⁸⁸ The pageant stage was draped in black cloth and decorated with two forty-foot inscriptions of the Ten Commandments. From the ceiling hung multiple candelabra and an illuminated Star of David, giving the arena a dim light.⁸⁹ The first act, "The Roll Call," opened with a powerful prayer-like tribute to "the two million



Figure 7: Franz Waxman conducts "We Will Never Die" rehearsal

⁸⁵ "SAVE DOOMED JEWS, HUGE RALLY PLEADS," *The New York Times*; Dawidowicz, "American Jews and The Holocaust."

⁸⁶ Wyman, 328-329.

⁸⁷ Hoffman, 152.

⁸⁸ Hoffman, 152.

⁸⁹ "40,000 Crowd Memorial Service in New York for Massacred Jews of Europe," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 10, 1943, accessed August 2020, <https://www.jta.org/1943/03/10/archive/40000-crowd-memorial-service-in-new-york-for-massacred-jews-of-europe>.

who have been killed in Europe.”⁹⁰ After a rabbi “from the ghettos of Europe” recited the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, an extensive eight-minute roll-call named 119 Jews from Abraham to Emma Lazarus.⁹¹ The next act, “Jews in the War,” married American patriotism with Jewish values in a dramatization of Jewish involvement in the armed forces of the United Nations.⁹² The final act performed in New York that evening predicted scenes of peace-talks after the war, haunted by the ghosts of dead Jews from across Europe. Based on Hecht’s essay from *The Reader’s Digest* earlier that month, each group narrated the memory of their death:

Remember us in Wloclowek. The Germans came when we were at prayer. They tore the prayer shawls from our heads. Under whips and bayonets they made us use our prayer shawls as knobs to clean out German latrines. We were all dead when the sun set – 100 of us. Remember us.⁹³

The elaborate visualizations were supported by a remarkable cast (in both number and influence), including stars Paul Muni, Luther and Stella Adler, John Garfield, Edward G. Robinson, and Yiddish-theater star Jacob Ben Ami, cantors, rabbis, children from a New York Jewish orphanage, and the NBC symphony orchestra.⁹⁴ Unlike the previous week’s single-performance rally, “We Will Never Die” went on a national tour, with subsequent performances in Washington’s Constitution Hall (April 12), Philadelphia’s Convention Hall (April 22), the Chicago Stadium (May 19), the Boston Garden (June 6), and the Hollywood Bowl (July 21).⁹⁵ At the Hollywood Bowl, Hecht added a fourth act titled “The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto,” which

⁹⁰ Recording of Hollywood Bowl performance of *We Will Never Die* (1943), July 1943, NBC Radio, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3HqzOCiZZ8>.

⁹¹ *We Will Never Die* (1943), July 1943; Robert Skloot, “‘We Will Never Die’: The Success and Failure of a Holocaust Pageant,” *Theatre Journal* 37, no. 2 (1985): 176, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207063>.

⁹² “40,000 Crowd Memorial Service in New York for Massacred Jews of Europe,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*.

⁹³ Skloot, 177.

⁹⁴ “MUNI, ROBINSON IN PAGEANT; Cast Completed for Tuesday’s Memorial, ‘We Will Never Die,’” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1943, accessed October 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1943/03/04/archives/muni-robinson-in-pageant-cast-completed-for-tuesdays-memorial-we.html?searchResultPosition=1>; Hecht, 558; Hoffman, 152.

⁹⁵ Skloot, 172.

frantically dramatized three weeks of battle.⁹⁶ The pageant's dramatic depiction of Jewish suffering throughout Europe, with a talented but then little-known actor named Marlon Brando in the cast, was a success in every city it visited.

The success of both demonstrations, Wise's "Stop Hitler Now" rally and Hecht's "We Will Never Die" pageant, was relative to their ability to mobilize the Roosevelt administration to rescue European Jews. The American Jewish Congress rally, while it garnered attention from the local New York population, did not impact national sentiment to the same extent as "We Will Never Die."⁹⁷ Hecht's pageant touched thousands across America, yet it fell short of making an impact upon the Roosevelt administration. At the DC performance of "We Will Never Die," viewed by Supreme Court justices, senators, congresspeople and the like, the final narrator condemned the special audience with his closing speech: "The silence of our history makers has made them honorary members of the German posse."⁹⁸ The production made no waves within the Capitol, but First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt gracefully acknowledged the pageant in her national column, "My Day." Both productions contributed to divisions within the Jewish American community among Zionists, Reformers, public protestors, Hollywood stars, and government ambassadors.⁹⁹ At the conclusion of this chapter in American history, neither Hollywood nor the Jewish public sector succeeded in changing the minds of Washington leaders in their favor. As Kurt Weill famously said of their 1943 pageant, "all we have done is make a lot of Jews cry, which is not a unique accomplishment."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Skloot, 172; Recording of Hollywood Bowl performance of *We Will Never Die* (1943) in July 1943, broadcast on NBC, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3HqzOC1ZZ8>.

⁹⁷ Wyman, 89.

⁹⁸ Hoffman, 155; Penkower, 289.

⁹⁹ Wyman, 328.

¹⁰⁰ Hecht, 576.

Maintaining the Myth of the American Melting Pot: The Refugee Crisis

“Just because you were German didn’t mean automatically that you were a monster.”¹⁰¹

– Fred Zinnemann, 1976

As the Great Depression sunk American spirits with mass unemployment and financial collapse, it simultaneously united the working classes in anti-immigration sentiment. Labor organizations worried that new immigrants would accept reduced pay and lower industrial standards, while blue-collar workers feared immigrants would push them out of their jobs. Long-standing xenophobia combined with the economic pressure of this era meant new arrivals to the United States faced social prejudice and legal discrimination.¹⁰² While it became increasingly dangerous to remain in Germany and Austria, European Jews considered moving to the United States despite the potential antisemitism and xenophobia they might face there.

Hitler’s ethnic policy intended to cleanse Europe of its Jews, making each country *judenfrei* (free of Jews), but did not cement plans for genocide until 1942. As early as January 1933, German and Austrian Jews understood the urgency of escaping their home countries as Hitler’s government pressured them toward emigration. Shortly after *Kristallnacht* in 1938, Hermann Göring established a Reich Center for Jewish Emigration in Berlin, headed by Heinrich Müller (1900-1945). As Nazi influence stretched across the European continent in 1938 and 1939, Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962) planted similar emigration centers in Vienna and Prague to pressure Jews into exile.¹⁰³ For those considering taking refuge in British Mandate Palestine, Nazi authorities had brokered a Transfer Agreement (*Ha’avara*) with the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which allowed

¹⁰¹ J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 25.

¹⁰² Paul R. Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3-4, 13.

¹⁰³ In 1939, Eichmann replaced Müller as the head of the Reich Center for Jewish Emigration. As the Nazi program against Jews entered its more despicable phases (concentration and liquidation), Eichmann continued organizing deportations. Thirty years later, millions of viewers worldwide would watch his televised criminal trial in Jerusalem.

Jews to leave with their wealth liquidated into German goods rather than have it seized by German authorities.¹⁰⁴ However, once war broke out in September 1939, possibilities for emigration through official channels such as these virtually disappeared. As described by Hannah Arendt, “hundreds and thousands of Jews had left their homelands in a matter of a few years, and millions waited behind them.”¹⁰⁵

The leadership of the United States adopted a stance of public compassion for “refugees” but harbored private indifference toward the lives of German and Austrian Jews. Anti-immigration sentiments had persisted across centuries, maintained by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elites and successive generations of nativist movements. When opposition to immigration from the early nineteenth century dissipated, the rise of the American Party in 1850 revived national feelings of xenophobia. The anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic organizations that made up the membership of the American Party used violent tactics, in addition to restrictive legislation, to deter immigration.¹⁰⁶

Despite efforts to board up the nation, millions of Europeans immigrated to the United States in the era after the Civil War. They included millions of Jews who fled antisemitic persecution in Eastern Europe, which culminated in devastating pogroms of 1881 and 1882 in the Russian Empire. The Jewish population in America steadily grew from 2,500 in 1825 to 240,000 in 1880, and then by leaps and bounds after 1881. By 1920, the Jews of America totaled 3.6 million. In just over fifty years, Jews had risen from 0.52 to 3.41 percent of the American population. Jewish immigrants pooled in California and New York; Jews made up over 27 percent

¹⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, “The First Solution: Expulsion,” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 32-35, accessed January 4, 2020, https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/arendt_eichmanninjerusalem.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 28.

of New York City's population in 1930.¹⁰⁷ The issue of antisemitism in America would inherently be tied inextricably to this period of mass immigration as nativists feared being "overrun" or "replaced" by Jews.¹⁰⁸

In reaction to the vast flow of immigrants, and particularly Jews from Eastern Europe, the Immigration Act of 1924 established a strict quota system that blocked Jews and other allegedly undesirable immigrants from passage to the United States even before the "refugee crisis."¹⁰⁹ The system was based on the national origins of the American population in 1890, before mass immigration occurred from Eastern and Southern Europe.¹¹⁰ These restrictions, which stymied Jewish immigration during the 1920s, remained in effect during the 1930s, when the need for a safe haven for European Jews became increasingly dire. Moreover, since the First World War, the United States had maintained a policy preference of isolation in regard to European, and especially German, affairs.¹¹¹

The Second World War catalyzed a revival of isolationist movements in the United States. Unnerved by Roosevelt's support in arming the British in late 1939, Yale law student R. Douglas Stuart founded the isolationist America First Committee (AFC). The AFC quickly grew in size due in part to support from prominent Republican senators and celebrity members. By late 1941, the AFC represented over 800,000 members.¹¹² The famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, still revered as a national hero for making the first solo transatlantic flight in 1927, became the AFC's

¹⁰⁷ Paul Ritterband, "Counting the Jews of New York, 1900-1991: An Essay in Substance and Method," in *Papers in Jewish Demography, 1997* (Association for Jewish Demography and Statistics, 2001), 201.

¹⁰⁸ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 28.

¹⁰⁹ Doneson, 16. The definitive work on the 1924 legislation is now Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* (New York: Scribner, 2019).

¹¹⁰ Peter Novick, "The War Years," in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 49, Internet Archive, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/embed/holocaustinameri00novi>.

¹¹¹ Bartrop, 13.

¹¹² David Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 236.

most prominent spokesperson. Emboldened by the devoted audience listening to his speech in Des Moines, Iowa, in September 1941, Lindbergh charged America's Jews with pressuring the United States into war.¹¹³ His explicitly antisemitic comments reverberated through news media, sullyng his public image and deflating the timely accusations of warmongering that Senator Gerald Nye had made against Hollywood executives that same month.¹¹⁴ Despite Lindbergh's antisemitic faux pas, the AFC maintained its large membership, threatening the security of Jews in the United States and abroad. With the barrier between isolationism and antisemitism breached, the Roosevelt administration felt more public pressure to maintain the anti-immigration attitudes of decades past.

When pressure began to build on the Roosevelt administration to address the plight of German and Austrian Jews, President Roosevelt took what amounted to evasive action under the counsel of the State Department. The United States' self-prescribed role during this crisis would be as lead facilitator of an international conference to discuss a "holistic solution" without applying pressure to any specific country.¹¹⁵ Thus, in 1938 the State Department sent a directive to Joseph P. Kennedy, American Ambassador in the United Kingdom, to determine if their government would:

cooperate with the Government of the United States in setting up a special committee composed of representatives of a number of governments for the purpose of facilitating the emigration from Austria, and presumably from Germany, of political refugees. ... [Any] financing of the emergency emigration referred to would be undertaken by private organizations with the respective countries. Furthermore, it should be understood that *no country would be expected or asked to receive a greater number of immigrants than is permitted by its existing legislation.* [emphasis added]¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Breitman and Lichtman, 187.

¹¹⁴ Breitman and Lichtman, 188.

¹¹⁵ Bartrop, 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Bartrop, 15.

The US and UK extended this invitation to 32 nations, excluding those with a record of antisemitism, such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania, and those still recovering from mass immigration after the First World War: Greece and Turkey.¹¹⁷ Willing nations convened in Evian-les-Bains, France, for nine days in July 1938.

In addition to national delegates, various international Jewish organizations attended the Evian Conference, serving as representatives for the refugee population. Among them were the American Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the New Zionist Congress, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, the Anglo-Jewish Association, and the Council for German Jewry. As in the United States, on this global stage the Jewish organizations could not agree on a common approach to present to the assembly.¹¹⁸ The ideas presented by the United States, represented by Myron C. Taylor (1874-1959), focused on absorbing the “great bodies of reluctant migrants” with haste and emphasized the United States’ sincere desire to alleviate the pressure on the international community. His broad language avoided the mention of Jews, instead naming refugees as those German and Austrian citizens who “desire to emigrate by reason of the treatment to which they are subjected on account of their political opinions, religious beliefs or racial origin” and those who have already fled from their home countries. Taylor bragged about the action the United States had already taken: the consolidation of the German and former Austrian quotas “so that now a total of 27, 370 immigrants may enter the United States on the German quota in one year.”¹¹⁹ But the hollow speeches given by Taylor and other the representatives at the Conference offered no specific commitments to relax immigration restrictions.

¹¹⁷ Henry L. Feingold, “Roosevelt’s New Deal Humanitarianism,” *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 74; Bartrop, 23.

¹¹⁸ Bartrop, 84-85.

¹¹⁹ Bartrop, 47.

While the Evian Conference did not expand the number of refugees allowed into the United States, Taylor's assistant back in Washington noted that President Roosevelt was "terribly embarrassed" he could not do more than exhaust the quotas. While Roosevelt did not clearly say so, the consensus of historians is that the president refused to risk his political capital for the rescue of European Jews, when the New Deal's success was fading and the isolationist and antisemitic America First campaign was gaining popularity among the public. In 1938, the United States accepted only 17, 868 refugees overall, "and the quota was never to be filled in any single year across the duration of what remained of the Third Reich."¹²⁰ At its conclusion, the Evian Conference did little more than turn "political refugees" into American shorthand for "German and Austrian Jews," and catch the attention of Hitler, who now understood that the Western nations would not be rescuing Europe's Jews.¹²¹

While the conference did establish the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees (IGC), the American architects behind it insisted on excluding those "who faced certain death in the camps" until January 1944.¹²² One such architect was Breckinridge Long, head official of the State Department's refugee policy, who felt responsible for upholding immigration restrictions against "Jewish Communist agitators" and insisted on the continued use of the euphemism "political refugee" as late as April 1943 (at the Bermuda Conference between the US and the UK) to avoid garnering sympathy for Europe's Jews.¹²³ Long, a member of the influential Breckinridge family and long-time friend of FDR, has been labeled by some historians as the primary "villain" responsible for the damaging American policies during the Holocaust.¹²⁴ The IGC went inactive

¹²⁰ Bartrop, 48.

¹²¹ Bartrop, 16, 95.

¹²² Feingold, 76-78.

¹²³ Feingold, 81-83.

¹²⁴ Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 164-165.

in 1939 with the beginning of the Second World War and Long remained a prominent decision-maker throughout the war.¹²⁵

For historian Henry Feingold, the White House's failures illustrate a clear intent to avoid any major effort to rescue European Jewish refugees. Historian Paul Bartrop notes that “every country in the world was formulating and administering an immigration or refugee policy—not a rescue-from-the-Holocaust policy.”¹²⁶ The bureaucrats in charge of immigration quotas could not have predicted the scale of the devastation that would come to the Jews of Europe, but they knew that Europe's Jews were in danger and with few exceptions they did almost nothing to help them. Unintentionally using a method similar to that of the top ranks of the Nazi Party at Wannsee, the State Department adopted its own *Sprachregelung* (speech code) that spoke of “political refugees” instead of Austrian and German Jews. Doing so kept administrators from being swayed by their compassion and prevented Americans from learning or caring about Nazi atrocities against Jews.¹²⁷ Both at the Evian Conference and at home in the State Department, the Roosevelt administration preferred to insinuate the identities of persecuted groups rather than define them – a pattern that would extend to Hollywood as filmmakers struggled with the possibility of addressing Nazi violence against Jews.

The Roosevelt administration’s obfuscation of the Jewish crisis in Europe resulted in a rigid approach to rescue that often followed the lead of the State Department. Even in situations

¹²⁵ In 1944, FDR permitted the creation of one refugee shelter in the United States, for just under 1000 European refugees, in Oswego, New York (Medoff, 285).

¹²⁶ Bartrop, 7.

¹²⁷ Arendt on *Sprachregelung*: “...it is rare to find documents in which such bald words as "extermination," "liquidation," or "killing" occur. The prescribed code names for killing were "final solution," "evacuation" (*Aussiedlung*), and "special treatment" (*Sonderbehandlung*) ... Only among themselves could the "bearers of secrets" talk in uncoded language, and it is very unlikely that they did so in the ordinary pursuit of their murderous duties... For whatever other reasons the language rules may have been devised, they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity in the various widely diversified services whose cooperation was essential in this matter” (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 43).

with extenuating circumstances, such as the episode of the refugee ship the *St. Louis*, the administration held firm against permitting greater immigration. In June 1939, 907 European refugees aboard the *St. Louis*, having just been denied entry to Cuba, requested tourist visas to stay temporarily in the US Virgin Islands. The administration rejected their request on a technicality and the ship was forced to return to Europe, where many of its passengers would die in concentration camps.¹²⁸ It was against this fraught background that a handful of refugee filmmakers began to dramatize the plight of Europe's Jews in their movies.

Ernst Lubitsch & Shakespeare-in-Exile

There's a revolution on in the world. Is laughter to depart? Is gracious and graceful living, wit and the jocund interplay, the amusing warfare of man and woman all to vanish? Must I weep for the world that was and not be permitted to re-create it? Devoutly I hope not. For then I should not desire to make more films. I should be content to die.¹²⁹

– Ernst Lubitsch, July 1943

For European filmmakers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, immigration to the United States meant safety from Hitler's Reich and the opportunity to create among Hollywood's best. Among this period's Holocaust film directors, only Ernst Lubitsch came to the United States from Germany. Long before Ernst's birth, Simon Lubitsch (1852-death unknown) fled czarist rule in Russia and arrived in a newly unified Germany. Simon met his wife Anna Lindenstaedt (1850-death unknown) soon after his arrival in Berlin.¹³⁰ After the births of their first three children, Richard, Marga, and Elsa, the Lubitsch family settled in an apartment on Schönhauser Allee, above Simon's own clothing store.

¹²⁸ Rafael Medoff, *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* (Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society of America, University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 285, <https://muse-jhu-edu.oca.ucsc.edu/chapter/2325030/pdf>.

¹²⁹ Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 289.

¹³⁰ Eyman, 19-20.

On January 29, 1892, the youngest member of the Lubitsch family was born: Ernst.¹³¹ He was a quiet child, who played the cello and the piano with a certain discipline that his siblings lacked. At age 16, he quit school at the Sophien Gymnasium and worked a string of jobs in order to finance night classes in the theatrical arts.¹³² His dedication to the theater proved fruitful in 1911, when the great director Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) selected Lubitsch to apprentice under him at the Deutsches Theater.¹³³ Under Reinhardt's mentorship, Lubitsch gained mastery of stagecraft and acted in many diverse stage productions, including the essential Shakespeare. As Reinhardt transitioned to film work, so did Lubitsch. He continued acting under Reinhardt's guidance on the stage and screen until 1917, when Lubitsch began directing films for the newly formed production company *Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft* (UFA).¹³⁴ Lubitsch's films during this early period of artistry are Jewish in character and therefore will be discussed in-depth later in this essay.

From his directorial debut, *Fräulein Seifenschaum* (Miss Soapsuds; 1915), to his final German production, *Die Flamme* (1922; U.S. release *Montmartre*, 1924), Lubitsch directed dozens of films across multiple genres.¹³⁵ As noted by biographer Scott Eyman, "New York intellectuals could talk of little else besides German movies, and of the most important movies of 1921, eight were German and three were directed by Lubitsch."¹³⁶ The up-and-coming German director accepted an invitation from actress Mary Pickford ("America's sweetheart" of the day) to move his business to Hollywood and direct her next film, *Rosita* (1923), for United Artists.¹³⁷ On December 2, 1922,

¹³¹ Eyman, 22.

¹³² Eyman, 25-28.

¹³³ Eyman, 32.

¹³⁴ In November 1917, German General Ludendorff merged two government film agencies, *Deulig* and *Bufa*, in an effort to battle anti-German sentiment in Hollywood films. Its purpose was to advertise Germany to an international audience. For more, see Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

¹³⁵ Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 36; Herman G. Weinberg, *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 14.

¹³⁶ Eyman, 75.

¹³⁷ Weinberg, 44.

Lubitsch and his wife, Leni Sonnet Kraus, left for California from the port of Bremerhaven. Leni's sons would arrive later with their grandparents, and Lubitsch would only set foot on German soil twice more in his lifetime.¹³⁸

The year before Hitler came to power, Lubitsch took his last visit to his home-country. In 1933, he wrote to fellow director Cecil B. DeMille of the urgent status of Jews in Germany:

It is needless for me to elaborate upon the need for funds in this emergency. The condition of the Jews in Germany today is one of distress. At such a time long speeches and lengthy pleas are superfluous.¹³⁹

Despite his sympathy for those trapped in Germany, Lubitsch was deeply ambivalent toward the waves of Jewish intelligentsia arriving in the United States. To support the remaining Jews in his home country, he solicited funds from the United Jewish Appeal, which he routed to the JDC and the Jewish Agency for Palestine as early as 1933.¹⁴⁰ He also assisted members of his own family in escaping from Germany.¹⁴¹ In 1933, the first year of the Third Reich, 525,000 Jews lived in Germany, but by the eve of World War II in 1939 just over 250,000 remained.¹⁴²

While the situation grew more dire in Germany, Lubitsch decided to settle in the United States. He received his American citizenship in 1936, shortly after the Nazi Party enacted the Nuremberg Laws.¹⁴³ Lubitsch found his niche in Hollywood with a group of German intellectual émigrés, including Walter Laemmle, Paul Kohner, and Conrad Veidt. Headquartered at Lubitsch's home in Beverly Hills, the self-labeled "Foreign Legion" maintained a social network which supported his political development as war became imminent in Europe.¹⁴⁴ After a trip to Russia darkened

¹³⁸ Eyman, 84-7.

¹³⁹ Eyman, 249.

¹⁴⁰ Eyman, 247-9.

¹⁴¹ McBride, 409.

¹⁴² Bartrop, 2-3.

¹⁴³ The Nuremberg Laws defined the membership of Hitler's *Volksgemeinschaft*, or "national community." This excluded Jews through marriage laws and racial laws defining German citizenship. For more, see Lisa Pine's *Hitler's 'National Community'* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).

¹⁴⁴ Eyman, 127, 136-7.

Lubitsch's view of socialism, he asked that his name be removed from the roster of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, "saying it was a tool of the Communists."¹⁴⁵ Instead, he lent his support to Hollywood agent and fellow German émigré Paul Kohner (1902-1988), founder of the European Film Fund, a committee that provided funds to new émigrés during the war. Other Hollywood immigrants supported the fund, including Curtis Bernhardt, William Dieterle, Lothar Mendes, Gottfried Reinhardt, Bruno Frank, Erica Mann, Walter Reisch, Salka Viertel, and Conrad Veidt.¹⁴⁶ For these naturalized Hollywood citizens, Hitler's war in Europe necessitated action.

Lubitsch, who had perfected his romantic comedy film-style in the 1930s, typically refrained from using his fame to comment on political current events – until the outbreak of the war. Although the United States' position of neutrality left him conflicted, in March 1940 he announced plans for an anti-Hitler film, *Heil Darling*. This film never came to be. Later that year, Lubitsch mused in a New York newspaper article: "Political events of today have terrific influence on the mood of an audience," but did they want "timely pictures filled with the topics of today [or] escapist films?"¹⁴⁷ While he discarded *Heil Darling*, Lubitsch's successful anti-Nazi picture *To Be or Not to Be* began filming in October 1941.

To Be or Not to Be is not an émigré story, yet with Lubitsch as director (and co-writer), the film eases through narrative complexities by using exilic strategies that play upon his experience as a German exiled in America. His team included two other émigrés, both Hungarian-born, producer Alexander Korda (1893-1956) and story-writer Melchior Lengyel (1880-1974), and

¹⁴⁵ Eyman, 247-9.

¹⁴⁶ Eyman, 247-9. See also chapter 34 of Salka Viertel's memoir, *The Kindness of Strangers*, reprinted by *The New York Review of Books* in 2019, for portraits of Kohner and Lubitsch.

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas Smedley, *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011), 208; McBride, 401.

screenwriter Edwin Justus Mayer (1896-1960), a member of HANL.¹⁴⁸ In the film, Lubitsch employs “‘exilic strategies’ of comedy, disguise, theatricality, and...dizzying changes of identity” to subvert the complacency that pervaded in Hollywood throughout the 1930s.¹⁴⁹ These themes of deception and coded language saturated American political culture and Lubitsch manipulated them to disrupt the systems from which they came. Lubitsch, as an émigré whose home country had fallen into fascism, brought his dual-identity into this film, a fast-paced depiction of life under Nazism imagined by a man who had escaped its reach.

To Be or Not to Be traces several intertwining story lines where single actors play multiple characters in different circumstances. In the first scene, Lubitsch relies on off-screen space to execute his first act of artifice. The shot opens with a birds-eye perspective looking onto Warsaw and the “voice-of-God” narrator informs viewers that it is August 1939: “At the moment, life in Warsaw is going on as normally as ever.”¹⁵⁰ His narration is interrupted, however, with quick reaction shots of individuals on the street. Some people stand still in shock, with mouths agape, while others run towards something off-screen. The camera follows the gathering crowd to reveal “The man with the little moustache...Adolf Hitler.”¹⁵¹ The narrator himself does not believe the circumstances; he continues to speculate about the possible reasons for Hitler’s arrival as the scene



Figure 8: Hitler on the streets of Warsaw in *To Be or Not to Be*

¹⁴⁸ M. B. B. Biskupski, "Hollywood and Poland, 1939-1945: The American Cinema and the Poles During World War II," *The Polish Review* 47, no. 2 (2002): 202, accessed November 14, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25779322>.

¹⁴⁹ McBride, 22.

¹⁵⁰ 02:16, *To Be or Not to Be*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch (United States: United Artists, 1942).

¹⁵¹ 02:36, *To Be or Not to Be*.

fades back to what appears to be the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin. Here, Gestapo leaders engage in conversation with a child about his dissident father. The plausibility of the scene abruptly stops when Hitler himself enters through the office doors and responds to their “Heil Hitler” greeting with a nonchalant, “Heil myself.”¹⁵² The camera angle reverses to reveal an agitated director who runs on stage and effectively breaks the illusion.

In this scene, Lubitsch establishes the viewer’s expectation that *To Be or Not to Be* takes place in an ambiguous reality that plays off their understanding of a typical cinematic narrative. Lubitsch employs situational irony, relying on the audience’s perception of Warsaw in August 1939 and of Hitler’s infamous position in global politics. The rapid movement between real Warsaw, to artificial Berlin, and back to Warsaw (with the knowledge of the troupe’s farce) is suggestive of Lubitsch’s perception of the Nazi leadership – they are just men engaged in theatrics, their stage is simply larger than that of the Warsaw Theater. This parallel between theatrical farce and the nonsensical pageantry of National Socialism informs many of the film’s scenes.

Returning to the scripted play, two *Gestapo* characters quarrel about a joke at Hitler’s expense: “They named a brandy after Napoleon, they made Herring out of Bismarck, and the Führer is going to end up as a piece of cheese!” This conversation repeats itself later between the disguised-troupe actor Tura and the actual Gestapo Colonel Erhardt. Tura and Erhardt boast similar egos (“So they call me Concentration Camp Ehrhardt!” / “You’ve heard of that great, great Polish actor, Josef Tura?”), and through their characters, Lubitsch implies the “universal fallibility” of humanity, whatever one’s national identity. *To Be or Not to Be* rejects the one-dimensional concept of villainy by allowing all of its characters the “occasional charm.”¹⁵³ Lubitsch does not discriminate against the Nazi rank-and-file because of their nationality; instead he mocks their Nazi ideology and the

¹⁵² 04:48, *To Be or Not to Be*.

¹⁵³ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

vanity of theater. Other anti-Nazi motion pictures lacked this nuance, including Andre De Toth's 1944 criminal drama *None Shall Escape*.

Andre De Toth & The American Dilemma

Born Sasvrai Farkasfalvi Tothfalusi Toth Endre Anral Mihaly on May 15, 1913, Andre De Toth grew up in Makó, Austria-Hungary, as the son of a civil engineer.¹⁵⁴ While his father hoped he would follow in his footsteps and join the Hussar calvary regiment, the young De Toth chose instead to study law “as a gift to [his] mother.”¹⁵⁵ While attending law school in Budapest, De Toth explored his interest in acting, photography, sculpture, and painting. He directed five films within the first year of his career in 1938 before he was assigned to produce propaganda films.¹⁵⁶ For De Toth, Hungary was just the beginning: “It was fertile, but too small. I wanted to grow... [other Hungarian directors] achieved up to a point, and that was as far as they wanted to go. They were happy there, it was good enough. I couldn't live that way – nothing is good enough.”¹⁵⁷

In August 1939, De Toth found himself in Warsaw, responsible for documentation of the German invasion of Poland. Despite his passion and propensity for adventure, this appalling experience shocked De Toth to his core; for nearly half a century, he remained silent about his experience on the frontlines. In his 1996 memoir, interviewer Anthony Slide asked De Toth about the September Campaign's impact on the anti-Nazi drama *None Shall Escape*, to which he responded, “It's coming from a different section of you – the giving section. You have to be able

¹⁵⁴ Unlike Lubitsch and Zinnemann, director Andre De Toth was not Jewish. However, his production team included Columbia Pictures' Jewish studio head, Harry Cohn, and an outspoken Jewish screenwriter, Lester Cole. Cohn and Cole's backgrounds will be covered in later sections of this essay.

¹⁵⁵ Andre De Toth, interviewed by Anthony Slide, *De Toth on De Toth: Putting the Drama in Front of the Camera* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996), 45.

¹⁵⁶ Rick Lyman, “Andre De Toth, the Director of Noted 3-D Film, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/01/arts/andre-de-toth-the-director-of-noted-3-d-film-is-dead.html>.

¹⁵⁷ De Toth, 36.

to divorce yourself. This is a kind of ‘directorial schizophrenia’.”¹⁵⁸ Despite his intention of removing himself from the film’s production, *None Shall Escape* has brief interludes of violence that evoke De Toth’s trauma from the invasion.

At the end of 1939, De Toth left for England, where he worked as a writer and second-unit director under Alexander Korda (also producer of *To Be or Not to Be*). Korda was the first Hungarian filmmaker to achieve an international reputation as a cinematic pioneer in 1930s Britain, starting with his huge hit *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933 and the French Revolution-era refugee-rescue film *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.¹⁵⁹ Although De Toth “did not particularly care for Korda,” he would work on eight Korda productions over his lifetime and only receive screen credit for one: *The Jungle Book* in 1943.¹⁶⁰ After De Toth's short stint in Britain, Korda brought him to New York in January 1940 via the *SS Rex*. As De Toth recalled in his memoir, “On her next crossing, the *SS Rex* was sunk.”¹⁶¹

Marked by the unlucky omen of the sunken ship, De Toth became a social pariah during his early years in the United States. The “land of refuge” had limited resources for exiles and De Toth felt he “was taking money and bread away from those who needed it. They were tough, dog-eat-dog years.”¹⁶² To establish his reputation as a trustworthy filmmaker during the HANL era, De Toth had to battle accusations of Nazi-allegiance from his Jewish colleagues at Columbia Pictures. Luckily, Korda was rumored to be working for Winston Churchill, in imaginary MI-units, so the gatekeepers at Columbia “deduced that a man who worked for Korda, who works with Churchill,

¹⁵⁸ De Toth, 48.

¹⁵⁹ John Fleet, “Alexander Korda: Churchill’s Man in Hollywood,” *Finest Hour* 179 (Winter 2018), 12, accessed February 16, 2021, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-179/alexander-korda-churchills-man-hollywood/>.

¹⁶⁰ De Toth, 36.

¹⁶¹ De Toth, 44.

¹⁶² De Toth, 44-5.

cannot be a Nazi spy.”¹⁶³ De Toth eventually found friends within the refugee community, including Billy Wilder, Paul Kohner, and Géza Herczeg. He felt a similar dissonance with the German intelligentsia as Lubitsch did, and even enjoyed his offbeat life in the Hollywood "proletariat" of film industry refugees. In his memoir, De Toth reminisced about picking up extra work with Ben Hecht:

“If people asked us, ‘What are you doing?’ we gave them an answer unheard of for Hollywood. People usually lied and said they were busy. We said, ‘Nothing.’ Even if we were busy, because the question was usually followed by, ‘Well, could you...?’ and we always could.”¹⁶⁴

After Columbia executive Harry Cohn (1891-1958) assigned De Toth to shoot *Passport to Suez* (1943) in just over a week, De Toth began reviewing an intensely dramatic script written by two other European exiles, Alfred Neumann (1895-1952) and Joseph Than (1903-1985).¹⁶⁵ After the Reich banned his works, Alfred Neumann fled from Germany and took refuge in France before settling in the United States. Despite his Academy Award nomination for *None Shall Escape* in 1944, Neumann has fallen into relative obscurity when compared to other “Deutsch-Hollywood” screenwriters, such as Bertolt Brecht and Bruno Frank.¹⁶⁶ With an original story provided by Neumann and Than, Jewish-American Lester Cole (1904-1985) joined the project as the screenwriter. To his recollection, when De Toth finally received the script, studio head Harry Cohn (1891-1958), who was notorious for his vulgarity, demanded that the director justify its controversial contents: “How the fuck do you expect me to sell this fucking shit in the South with four *Schwartzes* [Yiddish pejorative for African-Americans]... four Latinos ... and four gooks

¹⁶³ Ibid. For more on Korda and Churchill, see the documentary *Churchill and the Movie Mogul* (2019), written and directed by John Fleet.

¹⁶⁴ De Toth, 53.

¹⁶⁵ De Toth, 46.

¹⁶⁶ Hans-Bernard Moeller, “German Hollywood Presence and Parnassus: Central European Exiles and American Filmmaking,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 39, no. 2 (1985), 128, accessed Jan 4, 2020, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1347327>.

[American English pejorative for Asians] on the jury?” De Toth settled, instead, for one Black actor to play a jury-member on the tribunal, Jesse Groves. Nevertheless, the sentiment remains: De Toth insisted on the presence of a Black man in his second Hollywood motion picture because “it represented equality, a judge’s and a human being’s dignity.”¹⁶⁷ They shot the picture in two weeks and prepared for possible controversy upon its release.

None Shall Escape pushed against traditional industry standards by following a drama-documentary style that utilized flashbacks to create a singular narrative. Because of this gritty realism, critics now honor *None Shall Escape* as a precursor to *film noir*, a genre to which émigré directors would make major contributions over the next decade. Upon its release, however, critics and audiences reacted with polarizing responses. American Marines viewing the film from the Pacific front lauded its solemn approach to the war, rather than “the usual flag waving” and “bond sellers” typical of American war pictures.¹⁶⁸ *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther (1905-1981) offered a scathing critique of the film, writing,

A trick ... indictment against Nazi brutality—or rather, against the brutality of one Nazi officer—is used to convenient advantage in Columbia's new film, It makes for another picture which says nothing about the Nazis that hasn't already been said, which is obvious in its piling on of odium but which does so with a grim, relentless will.¹⁶⁹

While the *Times*' Crowther earned a well-deserved reputation for harsh judgments of innovative films during his twenty-five years as the “most important film critic in the country,” most American critics agreed with his negative verdict on *None Shall Escape*. *Variety Magazine* voiced

¹⁶⁷ De Toth, 47-48.

¹⁶⁸ Correspondence from the Marines to the Motion Picture Association, “NONE SHALL ESCAPE, 1944,” December 17, 1944, Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/10527>.

¹⁶⁹ Bosley Crowther, “The Screen; At Loew’s State,” *The New York Times*, published April 7, 1944, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1944/04/07/archives/the-screen-at-loews-state.html>.

a similar sentiment about the film's treatment of the German enemy: "[The] film offers an interesting and entertaining episodic recital of Nazi bestiality but offers no solution."¹⁷⁰ If audiences arrived at *None Shall Escape* hoping to learn something about the ideological elements that make Nazism truly evil, they certainly left disappointed. While the story attempts to connect Germany's loss in the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles to Grimm's despicable actions, the correlation is muddled. While blaming his self-hatred on the loss of his leg is feasible, in every other aspect Grimm is wholly and implausibly despicable. Even before joining the Nazi Party, Grimm greets schoolgirls in a predatory manner, berates Poland and its "village idiots" when speaking to his Polish fiancée, and smiles as he slaps and humiliates a child.¹⁷¹ De Toth unintentionally created a "portrait of a sociopath who happens to be a Nazi," falling short of a coherent cinematic critique of National Socialism.¹⁷²

After leaving Hungary, De Toth found himself forced into precarious positions by opposing groups: first, his government mandated that he document the Wehrmacht's violent entrance into Poland, then Hollywood gatekeepers forced him to prove that he was not a Nazi-sympathizer. De Toth arrived in Hollywood on the eve of the American entrance into World War II, disturbed by his past and resented under his present circumstances. *None Shall Escape* gave him a chance to indict Nazism publicly and personally. The ambiguous "evil" De Toth blamed for the crimes in his film is not simply "the typical confusion of Hollywood over whether to blame Germans or Nazism for the war," but instead a bold statement professing his new American identity.¹⁷³ He clarified doubts about

¹⁷⁰ Biskupski, 204; "None Shall Escape," *Variety*, published April 12, 1944, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/variety154-1944-04/page/n49/mode/2up>.

¹⁷¹ 08:01; 09:45; 15:29, *None Shall Escape*, directed by Andre De Toth (United States: Columbia Pictures, 1944).

¹⁷² Biskupski, 192.

¹⁷³ Biskupski, 192.

his own identity by creating a villain and sticking a “Nazi” label on him. Wilhelm Grimm, De Toth’s Nazi war criminal, represented the worst in humanity. In contrast, Fred Zinnemann’s *The Seventh Cross*, also made in 1944, introduced audiences to the “good” German, on the run from Hitler and his Nazi thugs.

Fred Zinnemann & The Hunted Émigré

Born in Austria-Hungary on April 29, 1907, Fred Zinnemann dreamt, as a young man, of becoming a professional musician. His parents hoped he might follow in their footsteps and become a physician, but after World War I “Vienna... was now the capital of a tiny, defeated, impoverished country, overflowing with doctors without patients.”¹⁷⁴ Zinnemann instead decided to pursue law at the University of Vienna, where he spent his free time watching films, including Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed* (1923), Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), and King Vidor’s *The Big Parade* (1925).

These remarkable films introduced Zinnemann to a new brand of social realism that revealed the potential of film as an artistic medium.¹⁷⁵ In 1927, Zinnemann left Vienna for the Technical School for



Figure 9: Still from *Battleship Potemkin*

¹⁷⁴ Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies. An Autobiography* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 10-11.

¹⁷⁵ Neil Sinyard, “A Worm’s Eye View of Hollywood, 1929-1948,” in *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2003), 9.

Cinematography in Paris.¹⁷⁶ Despite his education in the fundamental technical skills of cinematography, Zinnemann could not find movie work in France as a non-citizen.¹⁷⁷ He moved once more, to Berlin where he worked as an assistant cameraman on three films, including the now-celebrated neo-realist drama, *Menschen am Sonntag* (People on Sunday), whose production team included, in addition to himself, three future émigré directors: Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Billy Wilder.¹⁷⁸ Although the film was a smash success, the coming of the sound era overwhelmed the Berlin film industry and Zinnemann again struggled to find work.¹⁷⁹ Finally, in October 1929, he left Europe for New York.

In his autobiography, Zinnemann recalls his arrival in the United States on “Black Thursday,” the start of the Great Depression: “we heard of ruined stockbrokers jumping out of skyscraper windows. We saw none of this from where the *Leviathan* was docking. In retrospect, this was perhaps not the best moment to arrive in America.”¹⁸⁰ As in the case of the Hungarian-born De Toth, bad fortune marked Zinnemann’s entry to the United States. Deciding that “hardly any ‘real’ movies” were made on the East Coast, Zinnemann relocated to Hollywood.¹⁸¹ With the help of immigrant-Jewish connections, including a letter of recommendation to Carl Laemmle of Universal Pictures and apprentice work with screenwriter and director Berthold Viertel, Zinnemann gained access to important social networks. Viertel’s wife, Salka, held salon gatherings where Zinnemann could mix with industry professionals and eventually meet his filmmaking mentor, Robert Flaherty. He made his directorial debut with Paul Strand’s revolutionary film,

¹⁷⁶ Sinyard, 10; Zinnemann, 7-10.

¹⁷⁷ Sinyard, 10.

¹⁷⁸ Zinnemann, 14, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Vincent Brook, “Pathological Noir, Populist Noir, and an Act of Violence: John Brahm, Anatole Litvak, Fred Zinnemann,” in *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 206.

¹⁸⁰ Zinnemann, 17.

¹⁸¹ Smyth, 25.

Redes (*The Wave*, 1934), which told the story of a fishing community in Mexico striking against wealthy oligarchs.¹⁸² He then apprenticed with the MGM shorts unit from 1938 to 1942, where he “skirted the edges of noir with a couple of low-budget feature thrillers.”¹⁸³ Finally, in 1942, Zinnemann directed *The Seventh Cross*, “the first major American film to deal with, much less depict, a Nazi concentration camp.”¹⁸⁴

The Seventh Cross is based on leftist German-Jewish author Anna Seghers novel *Das siebte Kreuz*. First published in English in September 1942, the novel follows communist George Heisler as he escapes from a concentration camp in 1936. While MGM pushed Spencer Tracy (1900-1967) into the lead role, Zinnemann enlisted his mentor Viertel to find German and Austrian refugee actors for the secondary cast.¹⁸⁵ They filmed on MGM backlots and studio stages, “[simulating] German streets and buildings as best [they] could by rebuilding some French and English ‘city squares’ standing permanently on Lot Three.”¹⁸⁶ In retrospect, Zinnemann lamented the production’s lack of authenticity and excess of sentimentality – the gritty drama of Seghers’ novel was lost on the silver screen.¹⁸⁷ The combination of cinematography, cast, and Zinnemann’s directing



Figure 10: Still Image from *The Seventh Cross*

¹⁸² Smyth, 26.

¹⁸³ Brook, 206-7.

¹⁸⁴ Brook, 206-7.

¹⁸⁵ Émigré actors in *The Seventh Cross* include Felix Bressart, Alexander Granach, Kurt Katch, Kaaren Verne, and Helene Veigel, Brecht’s wife.

¹⁸⁶ Zinnemann, 51.

¹⁸⁷ Sinyard, 27-8.

translated Zinnemann's émigré background nonetheless. As noted by Vincent Brook,

the opening fog-drenched escape scene, shot by legendary Weimar cinematographer Karl Freund, is imported straight from UFA, while the story of a man pursued through the streets of his hometown, and the casting of Tracy in the innocent fugitive's role, clearly evoke Lang's *M* and *Fury*.¹⁸⁸

Zinnemann refused to admonish the German people for the crimes of the National Socialists. By making a resistance picture set fully in Germany, he could allow audiences to identify with the morally upright citizenry contending with Nazi forces. It is no coincidence that only the Gestapo Special Investigator Oberkampf speaks with a German accent; he is a bad person but “a good German: stony hearted, methodical, and ruthless.”¹⁸⁹ George Heisler is the kind of underdog American audiences liked to root for, outwitting the villainous Nazi regime.

Zinnemann and screenwriter Helen Deutsch (1906-1992) masked Heisler's communist affiliation, although Seghers' novel was already carefully drafted to avoid her own self-incrimination.¹⁹⁰ Rather than focus on his politics, Zinnemann had to amplify the inner turmoil of his protagonist to produce a redemption arc. In an early scene, George Heisler is caught resting outside by a small girl watching him from above in a tree. She innocently jumps down from the tree, staring harmlessly at him as she continues to eat her apple. The narrator, ex-prisoner Wallau (speaking from the grave), describes Heisler's thoughts: “There was danger in the child. He was cunning enough to play along to keep her quiet. And desperate and empty-hearted enough to kill her too.”¹⁹¹ As noted by J.E. Smyth, the scene echoes “*Frankenstein* (1931) in which the monster tosses flowers and then a little girl into the lake ... the figure of the communist/outcast is ironically linked with that of social ‘monster.’”¹⁹² Zinnemann's adaption relies on the American library of

¹⁸⁸ Brook, 207.

¹⁸⁹ 07:20, *The Seventh Cross*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Culver City: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944).

¹⁹⁰ Smyth, 30.

¹⁹¹ 12:58, *The Seventh Cross*.

¹⁹² Smyth, 33.

cinematic imagery to depict a far more sinister scene than the original story. In Seghers' novel, Heisler meets the young girl accompanied by her grandmother and the two adults converse briefly. He uses their cover to walk along the highway but escapes



Figure 11: Heisler is trapped by a young girl above him

their company without considering violence against them.¹⁹³ Zinnemann transformed George Heisler into an animal by using Wallau's voice-over rather than Heisler's inner monologue, and, in his words, recording

as much of the action as possible from George's point of view: the hunt, as seen through the eyes of the hunted— use first-person camera in a few high spots— as he approaches what (to him and to the audience) might be traps— as he walks toward and mingles with crowds— watching whether people are looking at him.¹⁹⁴

Zinnemann developed his protagonist from a hunted animal into a resistance hero in order to convince American audiences of his humanity, despite his nationality. In a surprising turn of compassion, *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther conceded that the film “creates a human sympathy for the people of a nation with whom we are at war and it tends, as have some others, to load Germany's national crime on Nazi backs.”¹⁹⁵

For these three European emigrants, defining their relationship to the Nazi regime was imperative to establish their identity in the American film industry. With xenophobia ingrained in

¹⁹³ Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross*, trans. James A. Galston (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), 26-28.

¹⁹⁴ Smyth, 30-31.

¹⁹⁵ Bosley Crowther, “‘Seventh Cross’ Anti-Nazi Drama, With Spencer Tracy, at Capitol – Other New Films,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 1944, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1944/09/29/archives/seventh-cross-antinazi-drama-with-spencer-tracy-at-capitol-other.html>.

American society, and worsened by the outbreak of war, European émigrés had to clarify their stance as anti-fascists through their wartime films. In *To Be or Not to Be*, Lubitsch successfully mocked the National Socialists by accentuating the flaws within their power hierarchy. Each Nazi leader shown is a “regular person,” who seems swept up in Nazi fervor. Because the audience relates to the Polish underdogs, moments that reveal the similarities between the Poles’ eccentric qualities and the Gestapo leaders’ individual personalities bring them closer to understanding the shared humanity between all sides. Zinnemann achieved this nuance as well, to a lesser degree. While *The Seventh Cross* gives the German people nuance, his treatment of Nazism alone is scathing. Unlike Lubitsch, Zinnemann affords no relatability to his Nazi leaders. Instead, the ordinary German people provide redemption for the nation as they make sacrifices to save Heisler. Heisler is preoccupied with survival for most of the film, keeping him in an animalistic state, yet he too redeems himself in the final scenes. De Toth failed to create a positive or nuanced portrayal of the German nation, but it is doubtful he intended to. His Hungarian heritage and émigré experiences forced him to declare an identity that was as far away from Nazism as possible. This inevitably resulted in *None Shall Escape*’s muddled treatment of the German enemy by focusing solely on German-turned-Nazi sociopath Wilhelm Grimm. De Toth stands apart from Lubitsch and Zinnemann through his treatment of Germans, but also in his personal background. Lubitsch and Zinnemann also carried their Jewish identities with them when they left Europe, De Toth relied on American Jews to inform his treatment of Jewish victims in *None Shall Escape*.

Jewish Suffering On and Off the Silver Screen: Antisemitism and Holocaust Imagery

The question can be posed like this: if one wants to testify [about the Holocaust], does one then invent a new form or does one reconstruct? ... If I had found an existing film -- a secret film because filming was highly forbidden -- shot by an SS-man, that shows how 3000 Jews, men, women, children die together, choking, in a gas chamber or crematorium, then not only would I not have shown it, I would have destroyed it.¹⁹⁶

—Claude Lanzmann, 1994

For those paying careful attention to the press reports on Europe, Hitler's genocidal program was visible by 1941, and certainly by 1942, the year United Artists released *To Be or Not to Be*. While on-screen depictions of Jewish suffering were rare, they illustrated that Hollywood filmmakers had enough information to accurately depict the Jewish experience in Nazi-occupied Europe.¹⁹⁷ The first major motion picture to specifically reference Jews in relation to Nazism was Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). Chaplin (1889-1977) himself was not Jewish and sought to ridicule Nazism, a feat only America's favorite comedian could get away with under the PCA. In the film, Chaplin plays Adenoid Hynkel, a caricature of Hitler, and a Jewish barber under his hand in the fictional country of Tomania. Chaplin later said: "Had I known of the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made *The Great Dictator*, I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis."¹⁹⁸ Chaplin, however, had already lived through three of the major milestones of Hitler's oppression of German and Austrian Jews: the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, Kristallnacht in 1938, and Hitler's prophecy speech claiming that another world war meant "the annihilation of the Jewish race in

¹⁹⁶ Claude Lanzmann, "Schindler's List is an Impossible Story," Rob van Gerwen trans., Universiteit Utrecht, accessed on January 23, 2021, Web Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180822072900/http://www.phil.uu.nl/~rob/2007/hum291/lanzmannschindler.shtml>.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 407.

¹⁹⁸ Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman, *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 196.

Europe” in 1939.¹⁹⁹ While he could not predict the mass murder to come, Chaplin took a stand against Hitler, unlike many others living in America.

Despite the information available to the American public on violence against Jews, the antisemitic attitudes of the time



Figure 12: Charlie Chaplin as Adenoid Hynkel

contributed to an overall indifference toward Jewish issues, particularly abroad. As illustrated by Wyman, antisemitism was widespread in American society as well as in Washington. In the 1930s, more than one hundred antisemitic organizations “pumped hate propaganda” across the nation, led by Father Charles E. Coughlin’s Christian Front, William Dudley Pelley’s Silver Shirts, the German American Bund, and the Reverend Gerald B. Winrod’s Defenders of the Christian Faith.²⁰⁰ Their propaganda consisted of pro-Nazi publications, organized demonstrations, and youth organizations mimicking Hitler Youth Camps.²⁰¹ While the government stifled organized antisemitism by these four groups as America entered the war, the effects of their hate campaigns continued to reverberate during the war years.

¹⁹⁹ McBride, 407.

²⁰⁰ David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 9, <https://archive.org/details/abandonmentofjew1998wyma/mode/2up>; H. L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 211.

²⁰¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “German American Bund,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-american-bund?series=9>.

Amongst the “epidemics of serious anti-Semitic actions” across the nation, the urban Northeast saw the worst incidents of American antisemitic attacks.²⁰² With youth gangs as primary perpetrators, vandalism wrecked Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, Jewish-owned stores, and neighborhood sidewalks. Jewish schoolchildren were the foremost targets of antisemitic violence. Lawrence Tubelle, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, recounted his childhood experience in Washington Heights, New York in the early 1940s:

Our Jewish school was held on the first floor of a temple, in a little room removed from the street by one little door. There were only about five or six of us, eight year olds, and Rabbi Schonbrun. One cold midwinter day, in the middle of our class, that door flew open and for what must have been three or four minutes but seemed an eternity, we became the targets of a constant barrage of rocks and ice. We all ducked for cover, but it’s amazing that none of us were seriously injured. That was the last time we attended “shul” in the temple classroom.²⁰³

As antisemitic attacks continually endangered Jews in New York City, the city with the largest Jewish population in the United States, the commissioner of investigation William B. Herlands produced an official report in 1944 on the issue. The Herlands Report blamed the laxity of the city police in seventy percent of the thirty-one cases studied and determined that all the perpetrators had been influenced by antisemitic propaganda at home, at school, and through pamphlets.²⁰⁴ From city police to the halls of Congress, American institutions were insufficiently vigilant in combatting American antisemitism.

In Washington DC, constituents boldly declared their antisemitic beliefs in hopes their legislators would act in their favor. Prior to 1942, members of Congress received hate-filled letters speaking against American intervention on behalf of the Jews, as illustrated in this excerpt from a constituent: “I see from the papers that 200,000 Refugee Jews in Hungary will not live through the

²⁰² Wyman, 10.

²⁰³ Lawrence Tubelle, “Me and the Nazis,” December 6, 1990, unpublished memoir, 2. “Larry” Tubelle is my maternal grandfather, who passed some of his written memoirs onto me when I began studying Jewish history.

²⁰⁴ Wyman, 10.

next few weeks. Thats too Dam Bad what in the Hell do we care about the Jews in Hungary. What we want is the Refugee Jews brought to this country returned where they come from.”²⁰⁵ Preference polls ranking American ethnic groups placed Jews last, while other polls indicated that over half of the American public saw Jews as greedy and dishonest.²⁰⁶ The abundant evidence of virulent antisemitism generated little response from the government, because many Washington decision-makers themselves harbored a dangerous mixture of anti-immigration and antisemitic prejudices. In particular, Congressmen Robert Reynolds (Dem, NC), Rufus Holman (Rep, OR), and William Elmer (Rep, MO) were strong advocates for American “nativism,” a masked term for anti-immigration sentiment and antisemitism.²⁰⁷ Many government leaders and American citizens did not care about the fate of European Jews, as long as they did not seek shelter in the United States.

Many Americans conflated their experiences with Jews in the United States with their perception of Jews in Europe. The majority of the American public were Protestants and Catholics; in 1940, Jews made up less than three percent of the nation’s population and lived mainly in New York and Los Angeles and other large American cities.²⁰⁸ The majority of Americans had no familiarity with Jews, apart from the conspiratorial stereotypes and inhuman imagery circulated by antisemitic organizations. As makers of motion-pictures, Hollywood studio chiefs, many of whom were Jewish, might have made an effort to illustrate the reality of Jewish life in America and to depict the life-threatening circumstances European Jews lived in. Yet, the American public would not buy tickets to see films about Jewish life in America or Jewish suffering in Europe.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Wyman, 12.

²⁰⁶ H. L. Feingold, “Response to the Holocaust,” in *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 251, https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780801843464; Wyman, 14.

²⁰⁷ Wyman, 7.

²⁰⁸ Nancy Copeland Halbgewachs, “Censorship and Holocaust Film in the Hollywood Studio System,” PhD diss., UNM Digital Repository (University of New Mexico, 2012), 106, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/soc_etds/18.

²⁰⁹ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 30.

The cycle of apathy and inaction continued between the public and the government, the public and local organizations, and the public and Hollywood.

Despite an industry-wide avoidance of Jewish narratives in relation to the war, antisemitic leadership in the Senate still targeted Jewish studio heads with the charge of warmongering in the years before entering the conflict. In 1940, Martin Dies, the founder of the House Un-American Activities Committee, began an investigation into political subversion in the motion-picture industry; however, the hearings failed to produce substantial charges. The 1941 Senate hearings rekindled the issue of subversion, with the official question at hand being: Why did Hollywood allegedly produce films in support of American intervention in the war in Europe?²¹⁰

On September 9, 1941, Senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota and Senator Bennett Clark of Missouri (1890-1954) began the hearings by introducing SR 152 to the Interstate Commerce Committee. Senator Nye began his statement by reading aloud a news article from Dr. John Sherman, president of Webber College, recounting Nye's peculiar speaking engagement a month prior:

On Friday August 1, 1941, the America First committee threw off the last shred of disguise (except its misleading name) as it presented Gerald Nye to a howling mob in St. Louis. The crowd-mob howled at every slur upon American foreign policy, cheered reference to democratic nonsuccesses, and particularly shouted approval of Nye's principal effort of the evening. ... a Hitleresque attack upon the American Jews. Deliberately, adroitly, with every trick of timing and inflection of voice, Nye accused the motion-picture industry of fostering pro-British sentiment, and then called a list of Jewish names associated with the motion-picture industry, drolly exaggerating their most Hebraic-sounding syllables, with pauses to encourage his inflamed heroes to shout and hiss.²¹¹

²¹⁰ "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941), U.S. Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce," in *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 476.

²¹¹ "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941)," 479.

Even before explaining the purpose of the hearings, Nye felt the need to clear his name against Dr. Sherman's accusation of antisemitism. The correlation between accusing the motion picture industry and harboring antisemitic attitudes was clear as Nye continued speaking, unaware of his own antisemitic tone:

Those primarily responsible for the propaganda pictures are born abroad. They came to our land and took citizenship here entertaining violent animosities towards certain causes abroad... If the anti-Semitic issue is now raised for the moment, it is raised by those of the Jewish faith and those who would prejudice the issues in these studies; not by me, not by this committee.²¹²

By blaming immigrants for manipulating American pictures and blaming Jews for conspiring against him with accusations of antisemitism, Nye demonstrated an embarrassing lack of self-awareness and discredited his own claims against Hollywood.

Will Hays and lawyer Wendell Willkie, both non-Jews, defended the motion picture industry against Nye for three months.²¹³ As Senator Nye called for testimonials from those with "Jewish-sounding" names, many of whom were European émigrés, representatives of the motion-picture industry proudly defended their cinematic depictions of wartime Europe.²¹⁴ Speaking to the Committee, Warner Bros. president Harry Warner said bluntly: "The only sin of which Warner Bros. is guilty of is that of accurately recording on the screen the world as it is or as it has been.... Apparently our accusers desire that we change our policy of picturing accurately world affairs and the national-defense program. This, Warner Bros. will never do."²¹⁵ Despite the strength and solidarity of Hollywood leaders during the hearings, which ended abruptly (and without result) upon American entry into the war, they left studio heads shaken. When polled in 1943 about the

²¹² "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941)," 480-481.

²¹³ "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941)," 481.

²¹⁴ "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941)," 487; J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 38-9.

²¹⁵ "Moving-Picture and Radio Propaganda (1941)," 487.

possibility of making a film considering Hitler’s treatment of the Jews, studio heads suggested instead “covering various groups that have been subject to the Nazi treatment [which] of course would take in the Jews.”²¹⁶ As illustrated by the three Holocaust films of 1942-1944, directors and studio heads chose to take the path of least resistance: they represented the Nazi regime’s suppression of Jewish voices by depicting Jews as secondary victims in Hitler’s war against Europe.

Ernst Lubitsch and the First Missing Jew

Ernst Lubitsch grew up in a major Jewish enclave in Berlin, called the *Scheunenviertel* (Barn Quarter). Named after its use as a horse barn in the eighteenth century, the Scheunenviertel housed Jews for centuries, after King Frederick William I of Prussia declared Jews must live in “earthy, unfashionable surroundings.”²¹⁷ Made up of Eastern European and Russian Jewish exiles in Lubitsch’s time, the Scheunenviertel was a haven in which Jews lived harmoniously alongside the sizable Catholic community in Mitte (central Berlin). However, it was not entirely free from



Figure 13: Woman buying produce in the Scheunenviertel in 1933.

antisemitism, which often manifested itself in neighborhood accusations against Jews of excessive criminality, vice, and Bolshevism. As German historian

²¹⁶ Peter Novick, “The War Years,” in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 28, Internet Archive, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/embed/holocaustinameri00novi>.

²¹⁷ McBride, 48.

Michael Hanisch suggests, Lubitsch's childhood in a "somewhat raffish district" fed into his later fascination with con men and "the demimonde."²¹⁸ When Lubitsch left his family to study theater under Max Reinhardt, the influence of his childhood in a Jewish quarter remained with him.

Although Lubitsch grew up in an assimilated family who identified as "Berliners" rather than Jews, he chose to weave his Jewish identity through many of his films.²¹⁹ Beginning as early as 1914, Lubitsch's films revealed his Jewish sense of humor; *The Pride of the Firm* (1914) and *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (*Shoe Palace Pinkus*, 1916) starred Lubitsch himself as an overtly Jewish caricature, whom he played (and would continue to play) despite accusations of questionable taste.²²⁰ The films featured "klutzy but ambitious Jewish shop clerks" that biographer McBride claims overtly exploit Jews by reducing them to stereotypes.²²¹ Even in the early stages of his career, critics forced young Lubitsch to defend his artistic choices; he countered by saying, "Jewish humor wherever it appears is sympathetic and artistic, and it plays such a large role everywhere that it would be ridiculous not to include it in cinema."²²² His taste for explicitly Jewish humor may have faded as antisemitism rose in Germany and abroad, yet Lubitsch never lost his "Yiddishizing lilt."²²³

With the release of *To Be or Not to Be* in 1942, Lubitsch once again brought Jewish humor to the silver screen, though now saddled with Jewish pain. In the years prior to the film's production, Lubitsch struggled with his relationship to the European conflict. In 1940, German director Fritz Hippler spotlighted Lubitsch in his infamous Nazi propaganda film, *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*). Hippler manipulated Lubitsch's image as a Jewish director, who "attained

²¹⁸ McBride, 48-9. Quotes by Hanisch are translated from German by McBride.

²¹⁹ Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 24.

²²⁰ Eyman, 45-47; McBride, 36.

²²¹ McBride, 36, 76.

²²² Eyman, 46.

²²³ McBride, 87.

prominence in Germany” through the work of his “Jewish cronies,” by playing newsreel footage of Lubitsch from his final trip to Berlin, saying, “I am very pleased to be back in Germany, and especially to be back in my hometown of Berlin.”²²⁴ As Nazism swept his home country, Lubitsch faced his own battle with antisemitism: how could he make a film dealing with Hitler’s brutal violence against Jews?

He found the answer in the creation of *To Be or Not to Be*, co-written by himself and Hungarian Jew Melchior Lengyel, who joked: “Writing for Lubitsch is just kibitzing.”²²⁵ The film stars comedian Jack Benny (1894-1974), a child of Jewish emigrants from Poland, who had been active in Jewish causes throughout the war.²²⁶ The film’s other Jewish star, Felix Bressart (1892-1949), was born in Eydtkuhnen in East Prussia, a border town between Russia and Germany. While there is little scholarship on Bressart, he is remembered for acting in over forty German and Austrian films (many of which were shown in the United States) and continuing his prolific career as a character actor after fleeing to the United States in 1936.²²⁷ In *To Be or Not to Be*, Bressart plays Greenberg, the martyred Jew trapped on the sidelines as the Nazis invade Warsaw. Through Greenberg and the destruction of his city, Lubitsch reveals the vulnerability of the European Jew.

Although *To Be or Not to Be* avoids using the word “Jew” entirely, Greenberg is clearly made Jewish by his appearance and by his repeated recitation of Shylock’s speech from *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. In the play, Shylock is a rich Jewish moneylender who enacts revenge on a merchant unable to pay his debt. As noted by historian Steven Alan Carr,

²²⁴ McBride, 20.

²²⁵ McBride, 401.

²²⁶ M. B. B. Biskupski, "Hollywood and Poland, 1939-1945: The American Cinema and the Poles During World War II," *The Polish Review* 47, no. 2 (2002): 203, accessed November 14, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25779322>.

²²⁷ "FELIX BRESSART, 57, VETERAN OF FILMS: CE ^ --C. ., LOS ANGELES HOSPITAL AFTER I SEVERAL MONTHS' ILLNESS," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Mar 23, 1949, accessed on January 15, 2021, <https://search-proquest.com.oca.ucsc.edu/historical-newspapers/felix-bressart-57-veteran-films/docview/105703957/se-2?accountid=14523>.

the “Elizabethan incarnation [of Shylock] readily translated into Jewish viciousness, greed, and amorality for turn-of-the-century America.”²²⁸ Lubitsch reclaims Shylock’s stereotype by having Greenberg (who has always wanted to play Shylock) recite Shylock’s most poignant speech to save the theater troupe. Greenberg recites this speech three times; first as a supporting actor in *Hamlet*, dreaming of a starring role; second as he walks along the destroyed streets of Warsaw, adding tragedy to the words; and third as the troupe intentionally aggravate Nazi men in the film’s emotional climax. Noticeably, the speech is changed to avoid explicit mention of Jews, a taboo in Hollywood during this time. Lubitsch shifts the phrases—“Hath not a Jew eyes?” becomes “Have we not eyes?”—and the impact remains the same when spoken in the face of (a double for) Hitler. In his final delivery of the speech, Greenberg lunges at Hitler (who is actually another member of the troupe, Bronski) as he passionately shouts the final line, “If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”²²⁹ McBride notes, “It is the crowning moment both for Greenberg and for Bressart as actors, and it may cost Greenberg his life, a sacrifice he is willing to make as a resistance fighter, using words as his weapons.”²³⁰ After his cry for revenge, Greenberg is dragged off by two (fake) Gestapo men, an allusion to his true fate. When the troupe make their way to safety in the British Isles, he is unremarkably missing from the group, who refrain from commenting on his disappearance. For both the Nazis and the anti-fascist Poles, the Jew is expendable.²³¹ Lubitsch’s choice to satirize and criticize both the Nazis and their victims appeared tasteless in its time.

Critics received *To Be or Not to Be* with disgust, claiming Lubitsch intended to make a mockery of the situation in Poland. American audiences had not yet recognized the “dark comedy”

²²⁸ Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26.

²²⁹ 1:30:26, *To Be or Not to Be*.

²³⁰ Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 419.

²³¹ Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 419.

genre, which became popular after the release of *Dr. Strangelove* in 1964. *NYT* critic Crowther attacked the film, writing,

To say it is callous and macabre is understating the case. Perhaps there are plenty of persons who can overlook the locale, who can still laugh at Nazi generals with pop-eyes and bungle-some wits. ... But it is hard to imagine how anyone can take, without batting an eye, and a shattering air raid upon Warsaw right after a sequence of farce... Mr. Lubitsch had an odd sense of humor—and a tangled script—when he made this film.²³²

When Crowther, amongst others, published his review of *To Be or Not to Be*, Lubitsch took to the newspaper to defend his satire:

Why then do audiences feel at liberty to laugh during “To Be or Not to Be”, and at times very heartily? ... Did I try to make them look at the Polish background through rose-colored glasses? Nothing of the kind. I went out of my way to remind them of the destruction of the Nazi conquest, of the terror regime of the Gestapo. Should American audiences be so callous that those burning ruins of Warsaw make no impression on them? I don't think that any one of us believes that. On the contrary, the many audiences I observed were deeply moved whenever the picture touched the tragedy of Warsaw.²³³

The back and forth between Lubitsch and Crowther reflected a larger conflict in the film industry over wartime imagery and the place of Hollywood in influencing public morale. American audiences were not yet interested in seeing the details of war, even if a few studio heads felt it necessary to publicize them. But two years later, De Toth's Holocaust film, *None Shall Escape*, written by Lester Cole, reproduced gruesome scenes and emphasized Jewish victims among the citizens of occupied European nations.

²³² Bosley Crowther, “The Screen,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 1942, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1942/03/07/archives/the-screen.html>.

²³³ Ernst Lubitsch, “Mr. Lubitsch Takes the Floor for Rebuttal,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1942, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1942/03/29/archives/mr-lubitsch-takes-the-floor-for-rebuttal.html?searchResultPosition=3>.

Lester Cole and The First Jewish Massacre

Lester Cole, the son of Jewish Polish immigrants, was born on June 19, 1904 in New York City. At the young age of sixteen, he left school to become a stage director and playwright. He arrived in Hollywood in 1932 as one of eighteen screenwriters for the film *If I Had a Million* (1932). The desperate conditions of the industry during the Depression led Cole to unionism and then to founding the Screen Writers Guild in 1933.²³⁴ Never one to shy away from controversy, Cole “was listed in twenty-odd organizations, from the League of American Writers..., to a member of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, the League Against War and Fascism, the Committee to Aid Republican Spain – and on and on,” he recalled in his memoir, “It is true, I was active in them all.”²³⁵ Cole established a lasting legacy as one of the Hollywood Ten, a group of industry figures who refused to testify before a 1947 House committee examining the Communist influence in the film industry. Congress convicted the Ten, including Cole, for contempt and sent them to prison in 1950. They remained blacklisted in entertainment throughout the rest of the decade.²³⁶ Among the thirty-six scripts Cole had written before the start of the case in 1947, his work on De Toth’s *None Shall Escape* was most significant for its revolutionary language.

Not only did *None Shall Escape* utilize “the idiom of the class struggle,” but the climax of Cole’s screenplay features an explicitly Jewish voice dissenting against his own murder.²³⁷ As noted by historian Peter Novick, the typical Hollywood portrayal of a concentration camp inmate was “a political oppositionist or member of the resistance,” as exemplified in *The Seventh Cross*.²³⁸

²³⁴ “Lester Cole Dies: In ‘Hollywood 10,’” *The New York Times*, published August 18, 1985, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/18/nyregion/lester-cole-dies-in-hollywood-10.html>.

²³⁵ Lester Cole, *Hollywood Red: The Autobiography of Lester Cole* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1981), 14.

²³⁶ “Lester Cole Dies: In ‘Hollywood 10,’” *The New York Times*.

²³⁷ Bob Herzberg, “III. Bodyguard of Lies (1942-1945),” *The Left Side of the Screen: Communist and Left-Wing Ideology in Hollywood, 1929-2009* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers, 2011), 155.

²³⁸ Novick, 26.

Cole, himself a proud oppositionist, rejected the assumption that dissenting individuals had to be heroic anti-fascists. Instead, his moment of revolutionary dissent came from Rabbi Levin (Richard Hale) before Nazi soldiers murder a train full of Jews. Much like Greenberg, the Rabbi delivers a powerful speech to “his people,” knowing that they are moments from their deaths at Nazi hands. Notably, this speech was not in Neumann and Than’s original story, but an addition of Cole’s.

Produced by Columbia Pictures under executive producer Sam Bischoff, the idea for *None Shall Escape* originated from a speech given by President Roosevelt on October 5, 1942, in which he declared that “The [Nazi] ringleaders and their brutal henchmen must be named and apprehended and tried in accordance with the judicial processes of criminal law.”²³⁹ After the War Information and the Polish Information Offices in DC approved the concept, the refugee writing duo drafted their screenplay.²⁴⁰ The tale of Grimm’s criminal background involved deportations of Jews, which alone was an admirable inclusion in the era of Jewish taboo. In retrospect, Cole wrote that their original “story lacked something: the Jews were passive; they went to their deaths without a struggle. True, some did, but others did not. [Associate producer Burt] Kelly agreed; passivity was horror but not drama.”²⁴¹ Because of this, Cole inserted the dramatic speech by Rabbi Levin: “We have submitted to many degradations... Submission brought us rare moments in history where we were *tolerated*... We must take our place alongside other oppressed peoples, regardless of race or religion. Their fight is ours, ours is theirs!”²⁴² Cole later admitted to plagiarizing these words from Dolores Ibarurri, known as *La Passionara*, a revolutionary in the International

²³⁹ Anthony Slide, *De Toth on De Toth: Putting the Drama in Front of the Camera* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996), 41.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Cole, 203.

²⁴² 1:10:00, directed by Andre De Toth, *None Shall Escape* (United States: Columbia Pictures, 1944).

Brigades of the 1930s.²⁴³ However, the line he claims to have stolen, “Fight, fight for freedom, for justice. It is far better to die on your feet than to live on your knees!” is not uttered in the film.²⁴⁴ Regardless of its origins, the communist character of the speech supersedes the Jewishness of its speaker.

The rabbi’s speech scene begins with him unsuccessfully trying to stop Nazi troops from burning Torah scrolls. Rabbi Levin frantically runs to the town’s priest, requesting his help. Together, they face Wilhelm Grimm as he orders Jews into cattle-cars with no remorse. Unlike the subtle indicators of Jewishness employed by Lubitsch, De Toth’s Jewish victims wear armbands adorned with the Star of David, which Hans Frank, head of the General Government, decreed all Polish Jews above the age of ten must wear on November 23, 1939.²⁴⁵ Rabbi Levin’s speech catalyzes a rebellion, which the Nazis quell with machine guns. The massacre of the Jews is prolonged, and considering the American appetite for depictions of violence, is excessive. The Nazis open fire for 24 agonizing seconds, in which the camera moves between the Jewish victims



Figure 14: The Nazis open fire on Jews

attempting to flee, the bright blasts of the machine gun, the restrained reactions of Marja and her daughter, and the light coming through the cattle-car slats.

²⁴³ The International Brigades were military units organized by the Communist International to support the Popular Front during the Spanish Civil War.

²⁴⁴ Cole, 203.

²⁴⁵ Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 101. The General Government was the Nazi-appointed Polish leadership of occupied-Poland.

After the brutal noise of gunshots stops, Grimm shoots Rabbi Levin in the stomach and the Nazi men drive away. The camera pans across piles of corpses to the wounded rabbi and the priest helps him to his feet. Rabbi Levin rests on a large cross for balance. The priest says to him, “You were right, David. We will never die,” prompting the Rabbi to begin saying the Mourner’s Kaddish.²⁴⁶ While the priest’s line possibly alludes to Hecht’s 1943 pageant, it unmistakably serves to connect the two men despite their religious differences. While the rabbi says Kaddish, the camera pans over to the Jewish bodies under the shadow of the cross. As noted by Doneson, this image does not “Christianize” the Jewish victims; rather, it “suggests the ineluctable coexistence of the two religions.”²⁴⁷ The teamwork on the script, by Cole, Neumann, and Than, with direction from De Toth, produced a powerful depiction of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazi foe, with the possibility for Christian solidarity.

Zinnemann and the First Concentration Camp

As a young adult in 1920s Vienna, Fred Zinnemann grappled with his Jewish identity while the Nazi Party rose to prominence in Germany. In his memoir, *A Life in the Movies*, Zinnemann recalled the discriminatory attitudes of Austrian society:

A Jew was an outsider, a threat to the country’s culture. Born in Austria, and raised as an Austrian, he would still never truly belong. An Austrian brand of Fascism had now begun to flourish; the Nazis were but a cloud on the horizon but people no longer laughed at Hitler.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ The Mourner’s Kaddish is the Jewish prayer for the dead.

²⁴⁷ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 254.

²⁴⁸ Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies. An Autobiography* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 11.

When he left Europe for the United States in 1929, *Mein Kampf* was already “obsessive reading” for Austrian gentiles.²⁴⁹ While Zinnemann immigrated with the intention of finding work in the film industry, he also left behind the shadow of fascism overtaking his home country.

In the years after his arrival, Zinnemann hoped to reunite with his family in the United States. Zinnemann’s brother, George, followed him to the US in 1938 and worked for the United States Typhus Commission. During the war, Zinnemann’s parents remained in Austria waiting for their American visas.²⁵⁰ Through his wartime work abroad, George attempted to locate their missing family members who had remained in Europe at the outbreak of war. A typical V-Mail from George to Zinnemann read:

Dear Folks, I tried to contact the Russian authorities the other day in order to get in touch with the parents . . . All the ‘Consulate’ consisted of was one typewriter, one picture of Stalin, and one guy who spoke even worse French than I do. And all he had to say was that he was sorry but he couldn’t do a thing for me and couldn’t offer any suggestions either. So all there is left to do is to go to the Red Cross; but I don’t have much hope of succeeding there either, after the experiences I had in London.²⁵¹

After the war, the Zinnemann brothers learned that their parents had been deported from Austria separately. Nazi-occupying forces deported their father, Oskar Zinnemann, in 1941 to Belzec, Poland, where he was murdered. Their mother, Anna, and her niece Helena Hirschhorn were sent to Auschwitz and likely died in early 1942.²⁵² In 1978, Zinnemann admitted his “survivor’s guilt” had affected his postwar work, leading him to direct the successful refugee drama, *The Search*.

His 1944 film, *The Seventh Cross*, has minor traces of Jewish direction, but far less than the other two Holocaust films of this time. Zinnemann’s film features two secondary Jewish

²⁴⁹ Zinnemann, 11.

²⁵⁰ Zinnemann, 55.

²⁵¹ V-Mail was the postal system for soldiers abroad to write home during World War II, short for “Victory Mail”; Smyth, 9.

²⁵² Smyth, 9.

characters: an offscreen escapee name Boeckler who is caught and killed by the Nazi men, and a Jewish doctor who assists George Heisler after he is wounded. Boeckler, “the little grocery clerk, a Jew,” wears a yellow star as he steps into freedom from the concentration camp in his one onscreen scene. His presence in this scene alludes to the Nazi incarceration of other Jews, who may have been imprisoned for their politics, but wore Jewish stars nonetheless. As noted by historian Peter Novick, “until late 1938 there were few Jews, as Jews, among those imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in the camps. The victims were overwhelmingly Communists, socialists, trade unionists, and other political opponents of the Hitler regime.”²⁵³ Boeckler’s character represents the beginnings of Jewish incarceration under Nazi rule, years before they enacted their policies of concentration and liquidation. Though he is only one of seven escapees, the Nazis will catch him and crucify him – a particularly despicable crime against a Jew.

Unlike in *None Shall Escape*, the victims of these Nazis do not share religious solidarity and the place of Jewish suffering is inconsequential in the film’s larger scope. The second Jewish character in *The Seventh Cross* is an ear and nose doctor, Dr. Lowenstein. Zinnemann introduces Dr. Lowenstein as he finishes stitching George’s hand wound, working with no attention paid to George’s pain, as he winces through the treatment. The doctor rises to fill out paperwork for George, then tells him straight-faced, “The law requires me to inform you before treating you that I am a Jew.”²⁵⁴ Despite having already begun George’s treatment, Dr. Lowenstein still follows the Nazi code for Jews, to remain “proper” in his interaction with this stranger. The shopkeeper (Agnes Moorehead) who assists George in the scene before also follows the ceremonial Nazi code although they are unsupervised, saying “Heil Hitler” dryly as he leaves her shop. Both the shopkeeper and Dr. Lowenstein let George leave without excessive questioning or abuse. When

²⁵³ Novick, 21.

²⁵⁴ 40:20, directed by Fred Zinnemann, *The Seventh Cross* (Culver City: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944).

George is finished at the doctor's office, Wallau narrates Dr. Lowenstein's thoughts: "He knew he should report this, but he knew he never would." There exists a silent solidarity between the Jewish practitioner and the escaped communist, both targets of the Nazi regime.

While his next film, *The Search*, would provide greater attention to the Jewish victims of Nazi oppression, the Jewish presence in *The Seventh Cross* is notable for its time. The taboo around Jews in Hollywood meant it would have been easier for Zinnemann to avoid the historical perspective of German Jews to tell George Heisler's story. But Zinnemann admitted, "there is in my blood a very strong Jewish tradition. I cannot pretend to live up to this religious life, but it gives me strength in all that I do, and has always done so."²⁵⁵ With *The Seventh Cross*, Zinnemann told two German Jewish stories, alongside the many others who encounter George. Without emphasizing their suffering or erasing them at all, Zinnemann provides a momentary glimpse into Jewish life in 1936 for an audience watching in 1944.

Before Hollywood showcased Jewish narratives, antisemitic propaganda and rumored misconceptions informed the American public's perception of Jews. In order to strengthen the public's connection with Jews in Europe, suffering at the hands of the Nazi war machine, European directors depicted Jews as secondary victims among many. Recalling that Pearl Harbor prompted American entry to the war, American audiences demanded studios focus on the Japanese front—prior to 1942, Hitler had not yet taken American victims. As noted by Peter Novick, there existed no equivalent to "Remember Pearl Harbor" to mobilize Americans against Germany on behalf of European Jews. But the watchful eyes of European-Jewish émigré directors of *To Be or Not to Be* and *The Seventh Cross*, and the diverse director-writer team behind *None Shall Escape*, presented European Jews as vulnerable and sympathetic to attract American audiences to their experiences.

²⁵⁵ Smyth, 10.

Who Are the Puritans in Babylon? Censorship in Hollywood

A deeply Catholic text, the [Production] Code was no mere list of Thou-Shalt-Nots but a homily that sought to yoke Catholic doctrine to Hollywood formula: The guilty are punished, the virtuous are rewarded, the authority of church and state is legitimate, and the bonds of matrimony are sacred.²⁵⁶

—Thomas Doherty

In the 1920s, the “one-man” motion-picture studio model dominated the industry as the sole as producers, distributors, and exhibitors of films. These studios, run by Jewish, mostly immigrant men, were the products of the Nickelodeon business of the early 1900s.²⁵⁷ A primary example is Adolph Zukor, a Hungarian-Jewish emigrant who would become the head of Paramount Pictures for over forty years. Zukor came to the United States in 1891 and bought his first Nickelodeon in 1904. Four years later he merged his booming exhibition business with Jesse Lasky and his partners, Samuel Goldwyn and Cecil B. DeMille, forming the leadership of what became Paramount Pictures. Their new film studio, with Zukor at the head, “perfected the concept of vertical monopoly” in the film industry.²⁵⁸ By the late 1920s, Harry Cohn (Columbia), Carl Laemmle (Universal), Louis B. Mayer (MGM), William Fox (Fox), and the four Warner brothers (Warner Bros.) each ran their own studio, virtually identical to the others. They each led “large-scale, tightly controlled vertical monopolies that produced, distributed, and exhibited films.”²⁵⁹ Their influence stretched from coast to coast; studios produced films in California, then shipped them to New York for distribution.

²⁵⁶ Thomas Doherty, “The Code Before ‘Da Vinci,’” *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2006, accessed November 2, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/19/AR2006051901530.html>

²⁵⁷ Nickelodeon theaters were small indoor movie theaters that played short films continuously and charged five cents for admission. They were most popular between 1905 and 1915.

²⁵⁸ G. D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23.

²⁵⁹ Black, 26.

As the studios established their prominence in Hollywood, they recognized the need for a trade association to upkeep their image. To this end, the moguls created the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) and hired William Harrison (Will) Hays (1879-1954) as its public-facing president in January 1922. Hays, a Presbyterian with midwestern roots and conservative politics, had previously served as the Postmaster General in President Warren Harding's cabinet and chairman of the Republican National Committee. More than a respectable American, Hays represented "mainstream middle America" in a "Jewish-dominated industry. He symbolized the figurative Puritan in Babylon."²⁶⁰ The so-called "moguls" relied on his ascetic personality to combat the antisemitic perceptions of Hollywood's leadership as sly Jewish money-handlers or immoral manipulators of impressionable American minds. With Hays as president, the MPPDA intended to protect themselves from economic pressure and personal defamation.

The MPPDA, commonly known as the Hays Office, hired Catholic priest Daniel Lord, S.J. (1888-1955) and motion-picture trade publisher Martin J. Quigley (1890-1964) to draft a Production Code establishing industry standards of conduct.²⁶¹ The Code expanded upon the Hays Office's existing list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," in order to create a conservative Catholic movie code that would regulate Hollywood's output long after the end of World War II.²⁶² The Hays Code included such rules as:

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

²⁶⁰ Black, 31.

²⁶¹ Doherty, "The Code Before 'Da Vinci'"; Black, 6.

²⁶² Black, 39.

3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.²⁶³

Lord and Quigley received the MPPDA's approval in 1930, after several rounds of discussion with the Board of Producers. Will Hays enforced his namesake Code, until disturbances from the Catholic Legion of Decency threatened its dominance in the industry.

Led by Church officials, the Legion of Decency claimed its own system of film rating and maintained a faithful membership of millions who pledged to boycott movies that failed to meet Catholic standards of morality. The Hays Office responded to the Legion's demands for Catholic standards of morality by placing Joseph I. Breen, an active Irish Catholic, as the head of their internal censorship division, the Production Code Administration (PCA).²⁶⁴ The PCA evaluated film scripts before production in search of Code violations; clean scripts received a literal "Seal of Approval" from the PCA or a careful rewrite from Breen himself.²⁶⁵

Breen took great pride in his work as the head of the PCA. His own deep-seated belief in conservatism and religious morality informed censorship in Hollywood, and his extreme antisemitism aligned with the moguls' private intentions of keeping Jewish imagery out of Hollywood.²⁶⁶ He could not, however, fulfill his inner desire of ridding the industry of their influence. Breen, after his first few months in Hollywood, wrote to Father Wilfred Parsons his opinions of the Jews in the industry: "dirty lice," "the scum of the earth," "simply a rotten bunch of vile people."²⁶⁷ He lamented their prominence in Hollywood, for as long as they controlled the industry, the Catholic Code would never fully work. Breen's strategies for dealing with the moguls,

²⁶³ Board of Directors of Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. *The Motion Picture Production Code (as Published 31 March, 1930)*, March 31, 1930, accessed November 2, 2020, <https://www.asu.edu/courses/fms200s/total-readings/MotionPictureProductionCode.pdf>

²⁶⁴ Black, 149.

²⁶⁵ Doherty, "The Code Before 'Da Vinci'"; Black, 199.

²⁶⁶ Black, 38-39.

²⁶⁷ Black, 170.

as bluntly described by historian Thomas Doherty, “If you want a Jew to do something, Breen asserted, you don’t ask him politely – you just tell him. Breen was convinced that screaming and threatening was the only approach a Jew understood.”²⁶⁸ Considering Breen’s background, it is surprising that he and the moguls collaborated for over three decades as censors of American motion-pictures.

By 1936, Breen had built a strong enough reputation in Hollywood to distance himself from the Legion of Decency.²⁶⁹ His enforcement of the Hays Code produced a “new morality” on American screens where “divorce was a sin, adultery was punished, ‘modern living’ was painted in negative terms, and virtue was rewarded.”²⁷⁰ Although the recovering economy was likely responsible for the improvement in box-office numbers, Hays and Breen claimed that the high cinema attendance proved the public enjoyed “clean” films.

When the war in Europe began in 1938, the PCA continued to enforce the Code’s existing guidelines on depicting foreign relations: “The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.”²⁷¹ Breen, who was offended by excessive graphic depictions of war, censored films documenting the atrocities of the Nazis. He avoided depicting European antisemitism in American motion pictures, claiming that it might “incite rather than inhibit hatred of Jews.”²⁷² While Breen was an anti-Semite, his public face never revealed his inner beliefs about Jews. The government’s Office of Censorship and the Office of War Information (OWI) similarly warned studios against producing films with Jews as the targets of Hitler’s

²⁶⁸ Black, 171.

²⁶⁹ Black, 173.

²⁷⁰ Black, 192.

²⁷¹ Board of Directors of Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. *The Motion Picture Production Code (as Published 31 March, 1930)*.

²⁷² Lawrence Baron, "The First Wave of American "Holocaust" Films, 1945—1959," *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): 92, accessed October 12, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23302762>.

violence, anticipating that German propagandists would cite philosemitic films as Jewish warmongering in the United States.²⁷³ Although the PCA and the OWI held similar values, the moguls were not interested in bowing to a new censorship authority.

After a brief period away in 1942, Breen resumed his duties at the PCA as an ally of the moguls. The OWI, the government's propaganda agency, established their Hollywood office in January that year with intent to infuse motion-pictures with pro-American messages.²⁷⁴ This meant more short-films like *Here Is Germany* (1945), a Twentieth Century-Fox documentary compilation depicting modern German history.²⁷⁵ The moguls did not want to serve the American war effort by crudely making propaganda, which was neither commercially beneficial or artistically fulfilling, as the OWI suggested. Instead, as Darryl Zanuck, production head of Twentieth Century Fox, declared in 1943, they sought to "play [their] part in the solution of the problems that torture the world," by beginning to "deal realistically in film with the causes of wars and panics, with social upheavals and depression, with starvation and want and injustice and barbarism."²⁷⁶ The realm of injustice the moguls would boldly confront was, in reality, very limited.

Before images of concentration camps reached American audiences in 1944 and 1945, few films (including those reviewed in this essay) confront Nazi barbarism against Jews specifically. Judith Doneson contends that only two films made between 1933 and 1945 stand out for confronting European antisemitism: *The House of Rothschild* (1934) and *The Great Dictator* (1940).²⁷⁷ The success of *The Great Dictator*, as with all Hollywood movies, depended on Breen's

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Black, 298.

²⁷⁵ Joseph McBride, *How Did Lubitsch Do It?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 85.

²⁷⁶ Nicholas Smedley, *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011), 50.

²⁷⁷ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 16.

approval—which was a star-struck and resounding endorsement of Chaplin’s script.²⁷⁸ Cushioned by the PCA’s approval and President Roosevelt’s enthusiasm for the film, Chaplin presented the Nazi menace as a novel comedy, easily digestible to American audiences before their nation had entered the war.²⁷⁹ Despite Chaplin’s cinematic victory against Hollywood censorship, studios hesitated to produce films directly referencing the targets of European antisemitism. The combination of Catholic moral codes and Jewish fears produced only three Holocaust films, which survived only by framing Jews as secondary victims of the Nazi regime.

The Lubitsch Touch

Lubitsch self-produced *To Be or Not to Be* under United Artists, with Alexander Korda presenting. United Artists did not follow typical studio guidelines; established by actors Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D.W. Griffith in 1919 to distribute their own films, UA contracted independent directors and provided them with loans to produce their films.²⁸⁰ Because of UA’s distinct approach to production, Lubitsch retained approval over writers, cast, and the film’s final cut.²⁸¹ The production company did not, however, leave Lubitsch and Korda entirely to their own devices. When UA received the script, titled in reference to Shakespeare, they suggested it was too highbrow for a commercial venture. In his tongue-in-cheek fashion, Lubitsch “suggested as an alternative *The Censor Forbids*, which promptly drew angry cables from Benny and [co-star Carole] Lombard.”²⁸² It is unknown to what extent the censor forbade Lubitsch in this project, because, as noted by Nicholas Smedley, the

²⁷⁸ Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 216.

²⁷⁹ McBride, 405.

²⁸⁰ Black, 25; McBride, 421.

²⁸¹ Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 293.

²⁸² Eyman, 297.

files in the PCA are lacking. They hold documentation of the “final shooting script” from October 1941, with revisions from the same month, and final edits from January 1942.²⁸³ Of note are changes made regarding the death of Professor Siletsky, the Nazi spy: the PCA tasked Lubitsch and his team with writing a Hays Code-compliant suicide letter and avoiding “any gruesomeness” in shots of his corpse. Unfortunately, the archive only contains the revised suicide note.²⁸⁴ The crew made final edits after Carole Lombard and her mother died on January



Figure 15: From right to left: Carole Lombard, spouse Clark Gable, and mother Elizabeth Peters in 1939

16, when their flight from Indianapolis to Los Angeles crashed into Olcott Mountain. The tragedy prompted removal of the unfortunate line within the script, “What can happen in a plane?”, which cost \$35,000 to reedit.²⁸⁵ UA released the film on March 6, 1942.

The comedy in *To Be or Not to Be* relies on the relationship between the stage and the powers of censorship. Since the PCA worked solely with script drafts, Lubitsch became notorious for side-stepping censorship through visual jokes and “sly deliveries” of innuendo that would not be apparent on a script.²⁸⁶ His famous attribution, the “Lubitsch touch,” not only refers to his stylistic individuality but also his ability to circumnavigate censorship restrictions.²⁸⁷ In *To Be or*

²⁸³ Smedley, 209.

²⁸⁴ Correspondence from the Production Code Administration to Alexander Korda, October 10, 1941, and Correspondence from Romaine Film Corporation to Allan Lynch with “Siletsky’s Note – page 74,” January 29, 1942, “TO BE OR NOT TO BE, 1942,” Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Digital Collections, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/15874>.

²⁸⁵ Eyman, 299-300.

²⁸⁶ Smedley, 55.

²⁸⁷ Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*, 106.

Not to Be, Lubitsch employs a sardonic self-referential humor where stage actors navigate the dramatic reality of World War II.

In the film's first scene, the troupe's upcoming play, *Gestapo*, is banned by Polish authorities out of fear it might "offend Hitler." The actors are censored by the threat of Nazi forces, yet, when the Nazis invaded Warsaw "there was no censor to stop them."²⁸⁸ The troupe's resentment over being censored reflects the internal Hollywood struggle of circumventing the PCA to depict controversial issues. As noted by Smedley, the conflicting influences on censorship for the good of Poland might be a Lubitschean allusion to "American isolationist complacency and to the PCA's complicity in this policy."²⁸⁹ Although Lubitsch successfully maneuvered his film through Breen's screening process, its content raised questions of ethics after its release.

"None Shall Escape" Escapes Censorship

None Shall Escape received approval from the War Information Office and Polish Information Office even before writers began working on the script.²⁹⁰ Because of their early dealings with these large censorship authorities, the film faced little opposition from the PCA despite its controversial contents. Breen reviewed the script and returned it to studio head Harry Cohn, referencing his one major qualm, the seduction and suicide of the young Polish schoolgirl, saying "We believe this element could be handled so as to be acceptable under the provisions of the Production Code, provided of course, that there was no attempt to dramatize the action further than what is already indicated in your outline."²⁹¹ De Toth executed the scenes in line with the

²⁸⁸ Smedley, 210.

²⁸⁹ Smedley, 210.

²⁹⁰ Anthony Slide, *De Toth on De Toth: Putting the Drama in Front of the Camera* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996), 41.

²⁹¹ Correspondence from Joseph I. Breen to Harry Cohn, "NONE SHALL ESCAPE, 1944," April 16, 1943, Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library,

PCA's recommendations: Grimm's crime occurs off-screen and the Polish girl is "of age," 16 years old. With the positive approvals of all necessary authorities, producers Samuel Bischoff and Burt Kelly made their final approval of the script and quickly set it into production. The producers hired a Catholic priest and Rabbi Edgar Magnin of Los Angeles to advise during the film's production to ensure they handled the delicate scenes of religious practice appropriately.²⁹²

The greatest source of friction came from Columbia studio head Harry Cohn. Though he considered himself a gambler, Cohn's Jewish identity heightened his sensitivity around *None Shall Escape*'s depiction of Jewish resistance against the Nazi enemy. Cohn reacted (in Lester Cole's recollection) with shock at his initial viewing of the film, exclaiming,

My God, this goddam thing is *controversial!* It would be okay if *goyem* (gentiles) made it, but for Jews to blow their own horn on how they're standing up to the Nazis is *chutzpah*, absolute *chutzpah*. It ain't true. Where the hell did Jews ever stand up to the Nazis?²⁹³

The depiction of violence against Jews, in part, accounted for Cohn's heated response. Cole, the writer directly responsible for adding the moment of Jewish resistance, felt his communist affiliation negatively influenced Cohn's opinion of his work. Nonetheless, Columbia screened the film on February 3, 1944, and received positive reactions from their East coast audience.²⁹⁴ Upon its wide release, *None Shall Escape* failed to attract ticket-buyers. Watching war-torn Poland was no way to escape wartime America.²⁹⁵

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Digital Collections, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/10527>.

²⁹² Andre De Toth, interviewed by Anthony Slide, *De Toth on De Toth: Putting the Drama in Front of the Camera* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996), 41. Rabbi Magnin was known as the "Rabbi to the stars" because of his close relationship to the Hollywood community. He served as spiritual leader at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple for 69 years.

²⁹³ Lester Cole, *Hollywood Red: The Autobiography of Lester Cole* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1981), 204-205.

²⁹⁴ Doherty, "'None Shall Escape,' Hollywood's First Holocaust Film, Was All But Unknown for 70 Years. Now It's Been Rediscovered," *Tablet Magazine*, October 31, 2016, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/none-shall-escape>.

²⁹⁵ Doherty, "'None Shall Escape,' Hollywood's First Holocaust Film, Was All But Unknown for 70 Years. Now It's Been Rediscovered."

A Close Eye on Zinnemann

After receiving the script of *The Seventh Cross* in 1943, the PCA confirmed to studio head Louis B. Mayer that the basic story aligned with the policies of the Production Code. However, they carefully noted,

we assume at all times you will avoid showing unacceptable brutality and gruesomeness concerning the treatment of the prisoners in the concentration camp and also of the fugitives who are captured and killed from time to time during the course of the story.²⁹⁶

These instances of “brutality and gruesomeness” referenced “the guard’s smashing Wallau over the head with the gun butt” and Heisler’s wounded hand. Another noteworthy edit from Breen was Bellani’s suicide, which had to occur off-screen – “the scene cannot be approved, as now written, because it is a violation of the Code, in that it has about it the appearance of a suicide that is heroic,” wrote Breen.²⁹⁷ Breen himself never approved the final script; instead, the Legion of Decency reviewed the film from their New York headquarters, then sent it to the nearby PCA office for final approval.²⁹⁸

Even without considering *The Seventh Cross*’ controversial material, MGM intended to keep a watchful eye on Zinnemann as he directed the film. Studio head Louis B. Mayer considered the director to be “the fourth important member of the production team (below the producer, the star and the script).”²⁹⁹ Zinnemann, a director in the early stages of his career, gave Mayer little reason to trust him to execute his own vision. During filming, MGM placed key individuals to oversee Zinnemann unofficially. Pandro Berman, producer on *The Seventh Cross*, installed his

²⁹⁶ Nancy Copeland Halbgewachs, “Censorship and Holocaust Film in the Hollywood Studio System,” PhD diss., UNM Digital Repository (University of New Mexico, 2012), 127, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/soc_etds/18.

²⁹⁷ Halbgewachs, 127-131.

²⁹⁸ Halbgewachs, 127.

²⁹⁹ Neil Sinyard, “A Worm’s Eye View of Hollywood, 1929-1948,” in *Fred Zinnemann: Films of Character and Conscience* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2003), 20-1.

assistant, Jane Loring, on the set. Zinnemann recalled her presence “was not good for morale,” as “the crew could tell she was a production spy.”³⁰⁰ In addition to Loring, Helen Deutsch, screenwriter, haunted the set to ensure her script was properly executed.³⁰¹ Veteran cinematographer Karl Freund also resisted Zinnemann’s artistic perspective while shooting on set.³⁰² Zinnemann did not risk upsetting these production supervisors, and instead focused his collaborative energy on the film’s lead actors. Throughout production, Zinnemann bonded with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, who played Paul and Liesl Roeder, George Heisler’s German “well-to-do” allies. The three rehearsed at nighttime, when they could escape the watchful gaze of MGM and perfect Zinnemann’s vision.³⁰³ Despite efforts by the actors to revive the piece, Breen’s edits to *The Seventh Cross* simplified the novel’s original story, resulting in a slow-paced and lackluster product.

The three films each navigated the PCA’s censorship process differently. Lubitsch, a master of innuendo, managed to slide his script past Breen and the United Artists studio heads with limited revision. The tragedy of Carole Lombard prompted the film’s largest edit, which did not affect the film as a whole. At every opportunity, Lubitsch approaches censorship with artful wit, implicating the futility of censorship as a comedic device in *To Be or Not to Be*. De Toth’s dark drama *None Shall Escape* also faced no backlash from the PCA. Unlike *To Be or Not to Be*, *None Shall Escape* went through proper processes before production, including getting the approval of various government offices and hiring religious advisors for their set, in order to appease the PCA. The film’s source of resistance came from studio head Harry Cohn, who (rightfully) worried about the controversy it might cause. When Joseph Breen received the script for *The Seventh Cross*, he

³⁰⁰ Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies. An Autobiography* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 51.

³⁰¹ Zinnemann, 51.

³⁰² J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 34.

³⁰³ Smyth, 34.

saw controversy. The content of Zinnemann's film, combined with his status as a young director, ensured his script was closely edited and his set was closely watched. *The Seventh Cross* suffered the most at the hands of the PCA, but all three films reveal the arduous process of censorship for those producing unconventional films in the early 1940s.

The Universal Tragedy: Holocaust Film After Liberation

And there was that one shot that I really loved...There was a field of corpses, *a field*, and one corpse not quite dead. And he looked and he saw the camera, did not know what it was, and he walked to the corpses, on top of the corpses, and sat down, ultimately, on the dead corpses, and stared at us. That was the shot. I was not there when they photographed it. But that was the shot, and I used the whole shot.³⁰⁴

—Billy Wilder on *Death Mills*, 1945

The press was the primary purveyor of the horrors of Nazi concentration camps at the end of the war. By May 1945, the final month of war in Europe, most Americans believed that about a million people, Jewish and otherwise, had died in the camps.³⁰⁵ As Allied troops liberated camps in April and May, camera teams followed closely behind, recording the sordid conditions for the living and the countless corpses of the dead.³⁰⁶ As noted by Lucy Dawidowicz, “Americans were shaken by the testimony of the living skeletons. It was then that the anti-Semitism which had persisted in the United States through the war abruptly diminished.”³⁰⁷ The realization that Hitler targeted Jews for annihilation swayed American attitudes toward Jewish-Americans into neutrality, although it did not increase sentiment in favor of relaxing immigration quotas to accommodate those Jews in Europe who had survived Hitler’s genocidal program. The Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons illustrated this point. Founded in 1946, the Citizens Committee created and supported existing efforts to bring 400,000 DPs into the United States. In response to the anxious public, their propaganda stressed that among this large population of DPs, only 20 percent were Jewish.³⁰⁸ Americans were fascinated by the tragedy from a distant perspective—

³⁰⁴ Billy Wilder, interview by Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 70-71.

³⁰⁵ Peter Novick, “The War Years,” in *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 24, Internet Archive, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/embed/holocaustinameri00novi>.

³⁰⁶ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 5.

³⁰⁷ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “American Jews and The Holocaust,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1982, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/magazine/american-jews-and-the-holocaust.html>

³⁰⁸ Doneson, 49.

they were more interested in postwar consequences of Hitler's genocidal regime than the stories of Jewish survivors and their reintegration into a safe society.

As a result, American films produced between 1945 and 1959 focused on thwarting Nazism by punishing war criminals and caring for DPs, rather than depicting the wartime experiences of European Jewry. In the early postwar years, Jews appeared as secondary characters in Hollywood films, only given the spotlight as "beneficiaries of American sympathy."³⁰⁹ European and Jewish émigrés still directed postwar films, which sustained the wartime archetype of the helpless Jewish victim who is bravely martyred or saved, in the end, by American forces. This may be, in part, due to the lack of documentation during the concentration and annihilation phases of the Holocaust. SS men strictly adhered to the photography prohibition in camps, so filmmakers and citizens alike relied on liberation images to fill the void of documentation necessary to recreate something for the screen.³¹⁰ *Die Todesmühlen* (*Death Mills*, 1945) was the first American film to utilize footage from the liberation of the camps.

Post-Liberation Hollywood Pictures

Produced by the US Signal Corps, *Die Todesmühlen* is a 21-minute documentary which shows the remnants of Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, Belsen, Buchenwald, and other camps during and after liberation. Allied cameramen recorded footage of the devastation as evidence for future criminal trials, to explain the high numbers of victims, and to confront the German people

³⁰⁹ Lawrence Baron, "The First Wave of American "Holocaust" Films, 1945—1959," *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): 93, accessed October 12, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23302762>.

³¹⁰ Ulrike Weckel, "Liberated on Film: Images and Narratives of Camp Liberation in Historical Footage and Feature Films," *Research in Film and History* 2 (2019), 1, https://mediarep.org/bitstream/handle/doc/15781/RFH_02_Weckel_Liberated-on-Film-.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y.

with the consequences of their complicity in Hitler's regime.³¹¹ To this end, the US Military Government for Germany screened *Die Todesmühlen* in American-occupied Germany, then rerecorded the narration to bring the motion picture to its home country. The film did not accuse the American people of apathy, as documentarians later would, but instead followed the era's typical diametric opposition of Germans and Americans as either perpetrators or saviors.³¹²

The film begins and ends with scenes of German citizens; first, carrying crosses to a funeral for 11,000 forced laborers burnt to death in a local barn. The narrator reminds the audience, "These 11,000 were a small fraction of the 20 million men, women, and children murdered by the Nazis... the product of 300 concentration camps."³¹³ The film uses, sparingly, footage of camp survivors smiling and waving to their liberators which had been directed by Allied cameramen on the scene. The film does not stray from showing the "foul, wretched remnants of human beings" and the various torture methods and gas chambers used to murder them.³¹⁴ It examines the economic



Figure 16: A field of corpses in Death Mills

operations of the camps and the Nazi leadership within the camps, but primarily displays the masses of corpses and the shocking appearances of survivors. The Jewish particularity of Hitler's victims is not mentioned. The Allied

³¹¹ Weckel, 2.

³¹² Laurence Jarvik's 1982 documentary *Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die* examines the delayed response by American leadership to rescue the Jews of Europe. He relies on archival newsreels and interviews with survivors, rather than superimpose a voice-of-God narrator over the footage, which speaks for itself (Kerner, 181).

³¹³ 01:35, directed by Billy Wilder, *Death Mills* (Federal Republic of Germany: United States Department of War, 1945).

³¹⁴ 05:41, *Death Mills*.

forces who “smashed through the barbed wire” of the camps are seldom seen genuinely interacting with survivors, a choice of the director, Billy Wilder (1906-2002).³¹⁵

Though Wilder takes no credit for the film’s direction, he is listed as the director on the project.³¹⁶ Wilder, a Jewish-Austrian émigré, worked as the head of the motion picture section of Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Army in Germany.³¹⁷ Thus, when the footage arrived from the Allied front, he spliced it together for the film. When asked about *Death Mills* in a 1998 interview, Wilder was adamant about his contribution: “There’s not one shot I made. I just cut it... There was nothing to direct. It had to be a natural thing that happened that they were just able to photograph.”³¹⁸ Wilder’s demand for objective documentation of the tragedy was true to his personality. After learning of his mother’s, grandmother’s, and stepfather’s deaths in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he remained distanced from the destruction of European Jews in his films.³¹⁹ Nonetheless, *Death Mills* brought the images of the camps to German and American audiences in a motion picture for the first time, transforming all documentaries and fictional depictions of the Holocaust after it.³²⁰

In 1946, Orson Welles’ *The Stranger* was the first film to utilize the images from *Death Mills* in a dramatic, fictional piece. *The Stranger* follows SS criminal Franz Kindler, played by Welles, as he forges a new identity as a German professor at a small New England college under the alias Charles Rankin. Detective Wilson of the Allied War Crimes Commission (Edward G.

³¹⁵ 02:13, *Death Mills*; Weckel, 6-7.

³¹⁶ Hans Burger worked under Wilder for the German language version.

³¹⁷ Billy Wilder, interview by Richard Lemon, “The Message in Billy Wilder’s Fortune Cookie: ‘Well, Nobody’s Perfect...’” (1966) in *Billy Wilder: Interviews*, ed. Robert Horton (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 48-49.

³¹⁸ Wilder, *Conversations with Wilder*, 70-71.

³¹⁹ Wilder, “The Message in Billy Wilder’s Fortune Cookie: ‘Well, Nobody’s Perfect...’”, 48.

³²⁰ For more on Holocaust documentaries, see Elizabeth Cowie’s essay, which draws upon *Night and Fog* and *Shoah* to discuss the issues of documentary as historical preservation: “Seeing and hearing for ourselves: the spectacle of reality in the Holocaust documentary,” in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).

Robinson) follows Kindler's movements and eventually enlists his innocent wife (Loretta Young) in his plan to trap Kindler. When she is not swayed by his persuasion alone, Wilson brings her to a screening room and projects clips from *Death Mills*, revealing atrocities that Kindler is directly responsible. The film does not specify that Jews were Hitler's primary targets of extermination, however, Kindler's character makes antisemitic comments that hint toward his particular motivation for committing crimes against humanity.³²¹

The allusive nature of *The Stranger* is reminiscent of wartime motion pictures featuring violence against European Jews. However, as noted by Lawrence Baron, it stands apart through detailed references about the attitudes of the Third Reich: the "clue about Rankin's antisemitism, the inclusion of concentration camp footage, and the reference to genocide."³²² Surprisingly, Breen and the PCA allowed the graphic imagery from the camps to be shown. Breen's only revision to the violence in the film was to replace "cyanide" with "poison," in reference to the Nazi gas chambers.³²³

For postwar American audiences, *The Stranger* was just another portrait of a despicable Nazi leader, akin to Wilhelm Grimm of *None Shall Escape*. Bosley Crowther reviewed the film, sardonically saying of Welles:

He is playing the role of the big-brain behind the Nazi torture camps. Nothing less, mind you! He's the inventor of their monstrous mass-murder machine...[yet] he gave no illusion of the sort of depraved and heartless creatures that the Nazi mass-murderers were. He is just Mr. Welles, a young actor, doing a boyishly bad acting job in a role which is highly incredible—another weak feature of the film.³²⁴

³²¹ Baron, 95-96.

³²² Baron, 96.

³²³ Baron, 96.

³²⁴ Bosley Crowther, "The Screen; 'The Stranger,' With Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young and Orson Welles, of Palace—'Renegades' Is Criterion Bill At Loew's Criterion," *The New York Times*, published July 11, 1946, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1946/07/11/archives/the-screen-the-stranger-with-edward-g-robinson-loretta-young-and.html>.

Crowther allows the film grace for its strong lighting and cinematography, which hinted toward the industry's shift toward film noir pictures. Remarkably, Welles intended the film to fall short of genius. He adopted the project as a means of proving to the studio system that he could work within their guidelines after years of conflict within the industry.³²⁵ Scholars of Welles' films have debated whether his intention of conformity eliminated the potential for *The Stranger* to carry a deeper meaning.³²⁶

In his essay on the matter, Barton Palmer argues that *The Stranger* is a rare case of artistic suppression that reveals the institutional patterns of the time by avoiding the convolutions that come with a strong directorial influence. Welles' choice to create a film noir with inspiration from horror films and German Expressionism presented his anxieties over "the phoney fear of Communism...smoke-screening the real menace of renascent Fascism" in a studio-friendly manner. Palmer argues that *The Stranger* exemplified the wants of the box office by portraying social optimism, when Welles himself was typically inclined toward the anti-establishment pessimism of film noir.³²⁷ As evidenced by *The Stranger*'s commercial success, Welles succeeded in creating a digestible anti-Nazi narrative for the filmgoers of 1946. Conversely, Welles created a film so far removed from his directorial style it has fallen into obscurity.

The next Holocaust film released after *The Stranger*, Fred Zinnemann's *The Search* (1948), achieved commercial success and lasting critical fame. Zinnemann took on the project after breaking away from MGM, after a period of suspension. His industry connections matched

³²⁵ Orson Welles, interview by Leslie Megahey, "Interview from *The Orson Welles Story*," in *Orson Welles: Interviews (Conversations with Filmmakers Series)*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2002), 189; Barton R. Palmer, "The Politics of Genre in Welles' *The Stranger*," *Film Criticism* 11, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1986): 32, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://search-ebscohost.com/oca.ucsc.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=31298173&site=ehost-live>.

³²⁶ Film critics and historians widely agree that *The Stranger* is Welles' worst film, and Palmer's essay is one of few which appropriately examines the film for artistic intent.

³²⁷ Palmer, 40.

him with Praesens Films, a Swiss-based production company. Zinnemann returned to Europe to work with producer Lazar Wechsler and screenwriter Richard Schweizer on the script for *The Search*, which dealt with child Holocaust survivors.³²⁸ In order to orient himself for the film's difficult subject, Zinnemann visited DP shelters in Germany and studied the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) case files and interviews with young DPs. The film's cast of child actors is made entirely of children from DP camps, with the exception of the lead role, Karel, played by Czechoslovakian child actor Ivan Jandl.³²⁹

The Search follows Karel as he lives in a DP shelter, so traumatized by his wartime experience he can't remember his own name. After running away from the shelter, Karel is rescued by an American soldier, played by Montgomery Clift, who teaches him English and cares for him. Meanwhile, Karel's mother (Jarmila Novotná) searches for him, but upon hearing (incorrectly) of his death, she resigns herself to working at his past-DP shelter as a caregiver for the remaining children. The mother and son are reunited at the film's conclusion. The film's contents flew through the PCA, with eliminations made relating to the death of an orphan, ("Eliminate all views of Raoul's body going over the dam") and lines alluding to under-age drinking.³³⁰ *The Search* won two Golden Globes, for Best Screenplay and Best Film Promoting International Understanding, the latter given to young Ivan Jandl for his exceptional performance.³³¹

During the immediate postwar period, filmmakers paid attention to dispelling the Nazi threat over telling the stories of concentration camp survivors. While Zinnemann's *The Search*

³²⁸ J. E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 14-15.

³²⁹ Baron, 100.

³³⁰ Deletion Reports, "THE SEARCH, 1948," July 23, 1948, November 30, 1948, Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Digital Collections, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/18136/rec/7>.

³³¹ Jandl, living in communist Czechoslovakia at the same, was not permitted to travel to the United States and collect his award. Zinnemann accepted it on his behalf at the Oscar Awards ceremony.

brought attention to the traumas incurred by children during the Holocaust, it gracefully avoided acknowledgement of the Jewish majority within the victimized population. This common tactic evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, allowing films to discuss Jewish victims as long as they were juxtaposed against Nazi villains. Through Hollywood, universalization of the Holocaust became a common theme in commercial films. The first and most influential piece of Holocaust literature, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, rose to its current status precisely by universalizing her story.

First published in 1947, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was translated into English in 1952 and quickly made into a stage play in 1955. With the approval of Otto Frank, husband-and-wife team Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett adapted the story once more for the screen.³³² George Stevens had secured the movie rights in 1956; his service in the U.S. Army's Special Motion Picture Unit in Europe profoundly affected him and instilled in him a determination to depict the brutality of the Nazi regime. Stevens toured the Amsterdam home the Franks took refuge in, guided by Otto, and visited Bergen-Belsen, Anne's place of death, in his preparation for the film.³³³ Despite his preparations, the film's authenticity is compromised by the conventions of the melodramatic genre.

As noted by Aaron Kerner, *Anne Frank's* success can be attributed to its narrative form, containing "the innocent child motif, the torment directed at the female character."³³⁴ The melodramatic genre employs the "disruption of social structures" to heighten the emotional response of American audiences, rather than rely on graphic violence.³³⁵ The films of the 1940s relied on violence to create empathy with victims: Zinnemann's concentration camp escapees are

³³² Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), a136.

³³³ Baron, 109.

³³⁴ Kerner, 134.

³³⁵ Kerner, 136.

hunted down one-by-one, De Toth's Jewish victims are massacred by machine gun, and even Welles' innocent female protagonist is traumatized by the graphic images of genocide. In a complete shift, Anne's story is optimistic and easily relatable to American audiences across time. Her youthful perspective has endured in public memory over all else. Words from her last diary entry, "I can feel the sufferings of millions, and, yet, if I look into the heavens, I think that it will all come out right, that this cruelty too will end," overshadow her death in Bergen-Belsen not more than a year after they were written.³³⁶ Regardless of the film's perspective, it brought public awareness to the Holocaust. Literature researcher Alan Mintz describes *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a "signal event" in popular culture, both because it made a Holocaust narrative accessible nearly fifteen years after liberation and because of the industry-wide shift toward "stories with more violence and mayhem" that occurred after *Anne Frank*'s release.³³⁷

Approaching Modern Holocaust Memory

From the 1970s on, following the larger shift in historical memory and public commemoration, Holocaust films were increasingly devoted to themes of resistance and rescue.³³⁸ The NBC television miniseries, *Holocaust* (1978), brought Jewish stories of suffering into the homes of Jews and non-Jews alike. Directed by Marvin Chomsky, *Holocaust* follows the Weiss family as the Nazi genocidal program overtakes Berlin, exploring "the growth of Nazism, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the 'efficiency' of Nazi planning, Auschwitz, the partisans in the forest,

³³⁶ "Anne Frank: Diary," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, edited April 23, 2019, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/anne-frank-diary>.

³³⁷ Nancy Copeland Halbgewachs, "Censorship and Holocaust Film in the Hollywood Studio System," PhD diss., UNM Digital Repository (University of New Mexico, 2012), 156, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/soc_etds/18. For a deeper examination of the evolution of Anne Frank in public memory, see Alvin H. Rosenfeld's "Anne Frank and the Future of Holocaust Memory," in *Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Annual Lecture, Washington DC, October 14, 2004*, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Publication_OP_2005-04-01.pdf.

³³⁸ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 248.

the ‘model’ camp Theresienstadt, and the departure of Rudi... for Palestine.”³³⁹ For the masses watching, *Holocaust* served as an entertaining “docudrama,” which fictionalized historical events and made the term “Holocaust” common among English-speaking nations.³⁴⁰



Figure 17: Still from the *Holocaust* opening theme

However, for critics, the miniseries was a kitschy misrepresentation of history that failed to transcend the melodramatic conventions of the television miniseries genre. Lanzmann, outspoken critic of Holocaust film and director of the monumental 10-hour film *Shoah*,

harshly said of the series, “because the reality defies the resources of any fiction, *Holocaust* perpetrates a lie, a moral crime; it assassinates memory.”³⁴¹ While Lanzmann would criticize future films about the subject, including Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, with the same tone of prophetic indignation, his assessment of the series rang true among his contemporaries. Another component heavily criticized by historians is the presentation of the story—with commercial breaks dictating the length of each scene. Annette Insdorf notes, “it packaged devastating gas chamber scenes into neat fifteen-minute segments separated by commercials for an air deodorizer and panty shields,” an insult to the memory of the Holocaust not incurred by readers of a memoir or viewers of a film.³⁴² The negative critical reception of Chomsky’s controversial project did not deter filmmakers from approaching the Holocaust. In the decade after *Holocaust* ran on television,

³³⁹ Insdorf, 5.

³⁴⁰ Kerner, 3.

³⁴¹ Kerner, 30.

³⁴² Insdorf, 4.

Hollywood continued to produce notable works tackling Holocaust history, including the award-winning *Sophie's Choice* (1982) starring Meryl Streep of *Holocaust*.³⁴³

Fifty years after Ben Hecht's "We Will Never Die" pageant, a bold call to action for Americans still widely unaware of the atrocities taking place in Europe, Steven Spielberg released *Schindler's List*, the film that would cement the Holocaust's central place in the American imagination until the present day. Spielberg, working as producer and director, brought three significant collaborators on-board to the project.³⁴⁴ He hired the established screenwriter, Steven Zaillian, to adapt Thomas Keneally's non-fiction novel for the screen, chose Polish-born Janusz Kaminski as the director of photography, and cast an unknown European actor, Liam Neeson, as Oskar Schindler.³⁴⁵ His carefully selected cast and crew make for a visually stunning and emotive film; *Schindler's List* received Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay among others. However, the reception of *Schindler's List* was not universally positive.

Critics of the film decried Spielberg's choice to popularize the story of an Austrian industrialist and NSDAP member over that of a Jew. Schindler follows a typical heroic arc, transforming from a "self-centered womanizer to a self-sacrificing savior," who simultaneously grows his wealth and strengthens his morality as the Holocaust is occurring.³⁴⁶ As noted by Aaron Kerner, Spielberg's Jewish characters "lack agency, and narratives get played *through* or *around* them, as opposed to *by* them."³⁴⁷ The exceptionally poignant conclusion of the film, a scene in

³⁴³ In 1983, Mel Brooks produced a tone-deaf remake of *To Be or Not to Be*, casting himself in the lead role. The irony of Brooks playing a single character that combines Hitler-impersonator, Bronski, and the consummate ham, Joseph Tura, is not lost on me.

³⁴⁴ Billy Wilder fought for the rights to make *Schindler's List*, but Spielberg wouldn't give them up. Wilder said in a later interview, "I would have done it differently—not necessarily better. I wanted to do it as a kind of memorial to my mother and grandmother and stepfather. Spielberg was always a wonderful director... But *Schindler's List*—it would have been something of my heart, you know" (Wilder, *Conversations with Wilder*, 21).

³⁴⁵ Insdorf, 260.

³⁴⁶ Kerner, 31-32.

³⁴⁷ Kerner, 32.

which the surviving “Schindler Jews” return to his grave and pay respects (the movie’s first scene in color), briefly reminds viewers of the Jewish survivors behind *Schindler’s List*. It does not, however, pay tribute to the memory of the millions lost during the Holocaust. As a signal event in Holocaust memory, *Schindler’s List* proved that American films could reach industry-wide praise and astounding commercial success without giving Jews agency in their own history.

Conclusion

In the fifty years between *To Be or Not to Be* and *Schindler's List*, the exact circumstances of wartime America never repeated themselves. The films of the early 1940s contain a sense of urgency unique to the time—émigré directors wanted to inform American audiences of the violence occurring against Jews in Europe but could not grasp “the Holocaust” as a historical phenomenon as filmmakers of today can. The patterns that have become ingrained in Hollywood depictions of the Shoah began in the highly censored, carefully curated motion pictures made between 1942 and 1944. In 1955, Joseph Breen retired and throughout the 1960s the PCA faded into insignificance.³⁴⁸ The reign of mogul-dominated studio systems also came to an end in 1958, with the death of Harry Cohn.³⁴⁹ Without the authorities of 1940s Hollywood, filmmakers have continued to struggle with the challenge of addressing a subject so large and grave that it defies the traditional conventions of narrative representation.

The Jewish and émigré directors of wartime America tasked themselves with the difficult mission of conveying the Nazi threat to the survival of Europe's Jews. The anti-immigration, isolationist, and nativist attitudes bolstered by groups such as the German American Bund and the America First Committee provided an unstable background for émigré directors to tackle controversial subjects in their films. Lubitsch and Zinnemann successfully portrayed Nazism as distinct from German nationality by lending the German people humanity in their respective films. De Toth, who faced questions of his own relation to Nazism upon arriving in Hollywood, chose to create a Nazi figure so malicious and inhumane his peers would not doubt which side he was on. Building on their own experiences with Jewishness, Lubitsch, De Toth, and Zinnemann produced

³⁴⁸ Nicholas Smedley, *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2011), 47.

³⁴⁹ Halbgewachs, 105.

the first Holocaust films, over thirty years before American audiences became familiar with “the Holocaust.” In doing so, they contributed to the growing corpus of imagery that American audiences would associate with the Holocaust for decades.

In the 1940s, the Catholic Production Code Administration and the Hollywood studio heads maintained a taboo on Jewish subjects in motion pictures (among many other supposedly forbidden topics). The high level of censorship was a product of the moguls’ fear of defamation over their Jewishness, pressure from the Catholic Legion of Decency, and the appointment of Joseph Breen as head of the PCA. These factors, combined with American intervention in the war, presented filmmakers with an abundance of obstacles to the creation of Holocaust films. Nonetheless, Lubitsch and De Toth produced strong representations of Jewish life in Europe. Lubitsch relied on allusion and innuendo, while De Toth kept the Jewish narrative secondary to the evils of Nazism in his film. While Zinnemann’s script maintained its minor Jewish characters, the PCA stripped the film of its political urgency and the character of Seghers’ original novel was lost.

Harry Warner said of Hollywood in 1939, “I tell you that this industry has no sympathy with communism, fascism, Nazism, or any *ism* other than Americanism.”³⁵⁰ The industry aligned with only one “ism,” Catholicism, to create a Production Code intended to insulate the studios from moral pressure and political interferences. Holocaust filmmakers resisted the social forces of isolationism, nativism and antisemitism by producing films depicting the Jewish experience in a Europe darkened by fascism. Their efforts succeeded to varying degrees. As a whole, *None Shall Escape* succeeded in bringing the violence incurred against Jews to American audiences as it was happening. *To Be or Not to Be* caused controversy over depictions of wartime violence, which largely overshadowed its subtle handling of Hitler’s persecution of Jews. As a Holocaust film, *The*

³⁵⁰ Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 201.

Seventh Cross fails to provide insight into the Jewish experience in Nazi Germany but offers a nuanced depiction of German citizens as ordinary people encompassing a range of responses to the Nazi menace rather than a uniform body of fascist monsters. These films did little to represent the scope and urgency of the genocidal threat faced by the Jews of Europe or to excite Americans about rescue efforts. But they remain today as significant markers of the origins of Holocaust memory, stifled in its time by the conspiracy of silence and evasion that put the first news of the Holocaust on the back pages of the *New York Times* next to ads for “rayon blouses and Saks Fifth Avenue’s winter clearance sale.”³⁵¹ Uninhibited by the boundaries of Hollywood film productions, only Ben Hecht’s Madison Square Garden pageant on behalf of the imperiled Jews of Europe mobilized Hollywood celebrities, Jewish leaders, and European exiles in a successful representation of the Holocaust. Hecht's pageant was more explicit and urgent than any of our three films: it was the politically charged equivalent of the Holocaust film that could not be made in the Hollywood of the 1940s.

Awakened by the Nazi threat to the Jewish people, Hecht did what few filmmakers would attempt over the next fifty years: he reminded Americans of the imminent dangers of antisemitism and the urgent need for action to stop the Nazi genocide. Jewish victimhood is the center of the Holocaust, yet through Americanization, the Holocaust is often perceived as a universal tragedy. Hecht understood that the path to action was generating compassion for the Jews of Europe, despite the obstacle of extreme antisemitism in the United States. Although the efforts of European and Jewish émigrés did not suddenly change American perspectives toward Jews, they brought attention to the Nazi violence and catalyzed the early formation of a distinctively American Holocaust memory. To use Hecht’s words from 1943: “Though they fill the dark land of Europe

³⁵¹ Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 169.

with the smoke of their massacre, they shall never die. For they are part of something greater, higher and stronger than the dreams of their executioners.”³⁵²

³⁵² Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (Simon & Schuster, 1954), 554-555.

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