

HISTORY 75  
FILM AND THE HOLOCAUST  
UCSC, SPRING 2014

For Winston Churchill, speaking in 1942, it was the "crime without a name"—a deliberate attempt by the rulers of a powerful state to annihilate an entire people and their centuries-old culture. Now the name of the crime—genocide—is all too familiar. We have a vast and burgeoning scholarship on every aspect of the Nazis' war against the Jews of Europe. There is also a large body of testimony by survivors, and an extensive literature of commentary and reflection on that testimony. And finally we have a rapidly growing number of documentary and narrative films about the Jewish catastrophe.

But the attempt of filmmakers to deal with the Holocaust suggests a number of problems. Is there, for example, an inverse relationship between historical accuracy and popular appeal? Are certain kinds of images of atrocities obscene? Are narratives of survival inherently unrepresentative? Is the subject of the Holocaust incompatible with traditional narrative cinema, as the great director Claude Lanzmann has argued? On the other hand, hasn't narrative cinema (*Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*) made an enormous contribution to popular understanding of this terrible subject? And haven't the documentaries, of which there have been so many powerful and moving examples in recent years, made a considerable contribution not only to popular memory but also to historical understanding as well? These are some of the issues we'll consider in a course that aims to combine the methods of historical study with the techniques of film criticism.

Please note: on Thursday evening, May 22, we will have a special guest: historian Kenneth Waltzer, our country's foremost expert on the Buchenwald concentration camp, will give a lecture preceding the screening of the film *Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald*, for which he served as the historical adviser.

1. FILM AND THE HOLOCAUST: HISTORY, MEMORY, AND CINEMA (April 1-3)

Reading: Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust: From Antisemitism to Genocide*, Introduction, chapters 4-6, 11

Recommended: Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Anne Frank and the Future of Holocaust Memory," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Meyerhoff Annual Lecture, 2005  
Yehuda Bauer, "On the Place of the Holocaust in History," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2:2 (1987)

Yehuda Bauer, "Is the Holocaust Explicable?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5:2 (1990)

Films: Jon Blair, *Anne Frank Remembered* (Britain, 1995)

Michaël Prazan, *Einsatzgruppen: The Death Brigades* (France, 2009)

Richard Trank, *Unlikely Heroes* (United States, 2005)

2. IN HITLER'S BUNKER (April 8-10)

Reading: Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, pp. 53-257

Film: Oliver Hirschbiegel, *Downfall* (Germany, 2004)

3. THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE AND THE "FINAL SOLUTION" (April 15-17)

Reading: Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust*, chapter 10

Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*

Film: Frank Pierson, *Conspiracy* (United States, 2002)

#### 4. THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH (April 22-24)

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, chapters 1-8

Haim Gouri, *Facing the Glass Booth: The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (selections on e-Commons)

Films: David Brinkley (narrator), *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (United States, 1997)

Michaël Prazan, *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (France, 2011)

#### 5. THE RESCUER (April 29-May1)

Reading: Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, introduction, essays by Barbie Zelizer, Omer Bartov, Geoffrey Hartman, Miriam Hansen, Yosefa Loshitzky, Sara Horowitz, Judith Doneson, and Jeffrey Shandler, chapters 1-8

Film: Steven Spielberg, *Schindler's List* (USA, 1993)

#### 6. THE SURVIVOR'S TALE I (May 6-8 )

Reading: Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust*, chapters 7 and 8

Solomon Perel, *Europa, Europa: A Memoir of World War II*

Film: Agnieszka Holland, *Europa, Europa* (France / Germany 1991)

#### 7. THE SURVIVOR'S TALE II (May 13-15)

Reading: Wladyslaw Szpilman, *The Pianist*

Films: Roman Polanski, *The Pianist* (France / Poland, 2002)

#### 8. AUSCHWITZ AND BUCHENWALD (May 20-22)

Reading: Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust*, chapters 12-13

Kenneth Waltzer, "What's in a Picture?" (on eCommons)

Films: James Moll, *The Last Days* (United States, 1998)

Rob Cohen, *Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald* (United States, 2012)

Special Event: Lecture by Kenneth Waltzer, historical adviser for the film *Kinderblock 66*, on Thursday, May 22

#### 9. DOCUMENTARY AND ANTI-DOCUMENTARY: FRANCE (May 27-29)

Reading: Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*

Films: Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (France, 1955)

Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (France, 1986)

#### 10. RESISTANCE (June 3-5)

Reading: Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*

Films: Edward Zwick, *Defiance* (United States, 2008)

Richard Trank, *Unlikely Heroes* (United States, 2005)

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FIRST PAPER (6 pages, due May 6)

1. "The most widely seen films about the Holocaust tend to focus on the mystery of goodness rather than the horror of mass murder." Discuss with reference to *Anne Frank Remembered*, *Unlikely Heroes* and/or *Schindler's List*.

2. "One single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did, but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way: If we were capable of taking in the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live" (Primo Levi). Discuss with reference to *Anne Frank Remembered*.
3. The theme of denial—the inability or refusal to comprehend the terrible truth and magnitude of the Jewish catastrophe—is pervasive in Holocaust literature and cinema. Choose two examples from the films we have encountered and compare and contrast their treatments of this theme.
4. How have filmmakers represented the Nazis? What problems are involved in using actors to represent Hitler, Heydrich, Goebbels, Goeth, and the other leading Nazis? Are the filmmakers aware of those problems, and have they solved them? Or compare one of the docudramas about the Nazis (*Downfall*, *Conspiracy*) with the use of documentary footage of Eichmann in *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*. Which strategy seems to be more effective?
5. Analyze in detail representations of Jews in the most important American film about the Holocaust, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Did Spielberg, as some critics have charged, marginalize the Jews by making a (non-Jewish) German the protagonist of the most widely seen film about the Holocaust?

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SECOND PAPER (6 pages, due May 27)

1. One of the most poignant images of the Holocaust: a photograph of a young Jewish boy in Poland with his hands up, surrendering to the Nazis. Filmmakers too have created unforgettable images of Jewish children in the Nazi era. Compare and contrast images of children, and their historical contexts, in any two films we have seen thus far.
2. Compare our two survivor's narratives, *The Pianist* and *Europa, Europa*, with each other. What elements do the two films share in common, and where do they differ from each other? To what extent do these films depart from the memoirs on which they are based? Is either of these films more successful than *Schindler's List* in combining popular appeal with historical accuracy?
3. In several of the films we have seen, survivors revisit the sites of their ordeals, sixty or more years after the end of the war. Compare any two of these films, and consider how this strategy of return achieves its results in each case.
4. Claude Lanzmann has argued that any narrative (fictional) film about the Holocaust, or any documentary film that recycles now-familiar images of Nazi atrocities, will necessarily be inadequate or obscene. Do you agree? Use two examples to support your case.

FINAL EXAMINATION: MONDAY, JUNE 9, 7:30-10:30 P.M.

Grade breakdown: first paper 30%; second paper 30%; final examination 30%; class participation (including attendance of both lectures and sections) 10%.

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Students with disabilities: If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me as soon as possible, preferably within the first week of the course. Contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu) for more information.

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