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Cinematically Educated:
Film's role in the evolution of Holocaust Education from 1960-2000

Michael Aaron Sommer

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
March 2005

Referees, Professor Jonathan Krasner & Rabbi Gary Zola

With appreciation to
Dr. Jonathan Krasner, Rabbi Gary Zola, and Dr. Fred Krome
for their encouragement, assistance, and support.

With love to my wife and son, Phyllis and David,
who inspired me and held my hand
throughout my difficult journey.
They fill my days with smiles and laughter.

And with gratitude and love to my parents,
Marilyn and David (z"l) Sommer
who raised me with a love of Judaism, and taught me that
anything is possible if you work hard enough.

Digest

This thesis focuses on four films that impacted the evolution of Holocaust films and Holocaust education since the 1960s. The four films are *Night and Fog* (1955), *Holocaust: the Mini-Series* (1978), *Genocide* (1981), and *Schindler's List* (1993). It will analyze the impact each film had at the time of its release, the content of the films as "Holocaust films," and whether educators continue to use these films today. The thesis will also present content analysis of the study guides and educational curricula that were developed for each of these films by various individuals and organizations.

Through the poignant nature of film and media, the images of the Holocaust have played an important part in educating Americans and American Jews in particular about the atrocities committed against European Jewry during the Holocaust. Analyzing the films' study guides will provide a lens through which the evolution of the goals of American Jewish Holocaust education can be viewed. Each of the respective guides has its strengths and weaknesses, and each promotes a distinctive message about the significance of the Holocaust to American Jews. Oral histories that elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of these films as educational tools will supplement the content analysis and show how Holocaust educators utilized these films. In the next decade it is important to look at the continuing role of film in Holocaust education as the last Holocaust survivors succumb to old age.

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Introduction

In the introduction to her book *The Holocaust in American Film,* Judith Doneson asks, "In what context does the Holocaust become relevant for a people who have no tangible understanding of its dimensions because they have not experienced it? Only media enabled the full impact of the Final Solution to be understood as camera teams filmed the 'horrors that remained after the liberation of the camps.'"[1] Through the visceral and poignant nature of film and media, the images of the Holocaust have played an important role in educating Americans and American Jews in particular about the atrocities carried out against European Jewry during World War II. Since, historically speaking, the "Holocaust touched only a small number of Americans directly,"[2] the challenge for Jewish educators is to recognize that in the absence of direct experience, a sense of connection must be established between Jewish-American youth and the Holocaust. This sense of connection is "critical to the development and self perception of American Jewish children," for them to better understand their Jewish identity on both a global and historical level.[3]

Between the 1940s and the 1970s

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[1] Judith Doneson. *The Holocaust in American Film* Syracuse. New York, Syracuse University Press, 2002 p. 4.
[2] Jeffrey Shandler. *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust.* New York, Oxford University Press, 1999 p. xi.
[3] Rona Sheramy. *Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education* Ann Arbor, UMI Dissertation Services, 2001 p. 2.

> the representation on the screen of the genocide of the Jews gave rise to a line of features soon named "Holocaust Films" by American critics and academic researchers, who believed they had discovered a new "genre." It can be found that these films correspond to a preliminary definition of three areas in which genre elements may be present—iconography, structure and theme. The setting, the choice of characters and their distribution, as well as the theme were dictated by history. The scenario, usually ending tragically, followed the same pattern of action—tearing away from the native background, flight, search for shelter, hiding, discovery, deportation to the death-camps.[4]

For the most part, however, educators utilizing film might not understand the importance of the elements of cinematic genre or the significance of a film's underlying message and themes beyond their personal knowledge or trust in secondhand recommendations of a film's qualifications as an educational tool. Some theorists discuss how "multimedia can provide an important supplement to multicultural education, bringing the experiences of marginal and oppressed groups to the mainstream." They also argue, however, "that effective media education requires historical contextualization, the skills of media literacy, and engaging pedagogical presentation in the classroom to make it effective as a supplement to traditional classroom and print-based education."[5] The use of films as an educational tool in Holocaust studies

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[4] N. T. Brown. "From Wiemar to Hollywood: Christian Images and the Portrayal of the Jew" (*Film and History*). Peter C. Rollins, ed. Cleveland, Oklahoma Vol. 32.2, 2002. p. 19. Author's quotation marks on "Holocaust Films."
[5] R. Hammer and D. Kellner "Multimedia Pedagogy and Multicultural Education for the New Millennium" (*Religious Education*). Volume 95 No. 4 Fall 2000.

without proper experience or understanding poses the risk of causing harm or trauma to students.

This thesis will focus on four films that had a significant impact on the evolution of Holocaust films and Holocaust education since the 1960s: *Night and Fog* (1955), *Holocaust: the Mini-Series* (1978), *Genocide* (1981), and *Schindler's List* (1993).[6] It will analyze the impact each film had at the time of its release and their content as "Holocaust films." It will also explore the extent to which educators continue to use these films today. The thesis will also present content analysis of the study guides and educational curricula that were developed for each of these films by various individuals and organizations to facilitate their use in classrooms, synagogues and homes.[7] My goal is to further our understanding of the role that these films played in the evolution of American Jewish Holocaust education since 1960.

My research will draw from archival research, interviews, textbook and curricular analysis, and popular and scholarly analyses of the films and the accompanying study guides. Analyzing the study guides created for the films will provide a lens through which the evolution of the goals

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[6] The highly influential Holocaust film *The Diary of Anne Frank* is omitted here because it has already been widely analyzed and debated by historians, scholars, and educators.

[7] See for example Brickner, Rabbi Balfour. *Study Guide to the Film* Judgment at Nuremberg. New York, NY: Commission on Social Action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, year unknown; *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List.* Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc.; C. Krantz. "Teaching *Night and Fog.*" (*Film and History*). Cleveland, Oklahoma, 1985.

of American Jewish Holocaust education can be viewed. Each of the respective guides has its strengths and weaknesses, and each promotes a distinctive message about the significance of the Holocaust to American Jews. Oral histories that elucidate how Holocaust educators utilized these films and their strengths and weaknesses as educational tools will supplement the content analysis. As we move into the next decade of Holocaust education, it is important to look at the continuing role of film and how it can best be used to achieve the educational goals of tomorrow as the last Holocaust survivors succumb to old age.

Background Literature and Sourcebase

In recent years, much has been written about the evolution of Holocaust education, preparation for teaching about the Holocaust, and the representation of the Holocaust in film. In her recently completed doctoral thesis, *Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education,*[8] Rona Sheramy takes an extensive look at the role of Holocaust in American Jewish education. She analyzes how the central themes focused on by educators evolved through the five decades following the end of World War II. Another volume published recently is Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg's collection of essays, *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*[9]. The essays emphasize the importance of

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[8] Sheramy. Op. cit.
[9] Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg, eds. *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust.* Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2001.

Holocaust education as well as the ever-evolving process of both teaching about the Holocaust and learning how to teach the Holocaust.

Many books deal with representations of the Holocaust in film and media both in general and in America specifically. In *While America Watches*, Jeffrey Shandler analyzes the historical evolution of the representation of the Holocaust on television from the 1950s-1990s. Judith Doneson analyzes the evolution of Holocaust films in America in *The Holocaust in American Film*. Doneson's study begins with an analysis of the earliest representations of the Jew and anti-Semitism in American films, and culminates in an analysis of *Schindler's List*. Ilan Avisar's *Screening the Holocaust* and Annette Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows* deal with the evolution of the cinematic interpretations and representations of the Holocaust in European and American productions. Both suggest the difficulty of representing the Holocaust as well as the themes and cinematic tools used in films dealing with the Holocaust. Yosefa Loshitzky's *Spielberg's Holocaust* is an entire book of essays dealing with the strengths and flaws of *Schindler's List* as well as the historical impact the film had on world Holocaust consciousness and how the film compares to other significant Holocaust films. All of these books provide extensive insight into the history of the Holocaust as it is represented in film. These volumes provide a great look into the historical periods during which the films were produced. They also provide insight into the

films that both preceded and followed the four films being examined in this study.

John E. O'Connor's *Image as Artifact*[10] and Alan Mintz's *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*[11] explore how media shapes Holocaust memory in American culture. Three other volumes that offer insight into the role of the Holocaust in American life, specifically the commercialization of the Holocaust, are *The Holocaust in American Life*[12] by Peter Novick, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*[13] edited by Hilene Flanzbaum, and *Selling the Holocaust*[14] by Tim Cole. These books provide critical insight into how the Holocaust has become a major commercial enterprise as it evolved into a central component of Jewish and American education. Also dealt with is the process of Americanizing an event experienced by few Americans, but which many regard as significant in understanding history and the individual's role in history.

These books and others provided this study with historical background information concerning the evolution of the Holocaust in education, film, and American culture. They provided the historical

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[10] John E. O'Connor ed. *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television.* Malabar, Florida, Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990.
[11] Alan Mintz. *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America.* Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2001.
[12] Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life.* New York, Houghton Mifflin Books, 2000.
[13] Hilene Flanzbaum ed. *The Americanization of the Holocaust.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
[14] Tim Cole. *Selling the Holocaust.* New York, Routledge, 2000.

background for the eras in which the films of this study were produced and released. Doneson believes "cinematic records of events like the Holocaust can be orchestrated to serve the filmmaker's vision, which may or may not conflict with the historical reality. To utilize films in the classroom requires an effort by the instructor to recognize potential difficulties and teach the material judiciously."[15] Her quote underscores the importance of studying significant Holocaust films, their use in education and their lasting impact on society.

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[15] Judith Doneson. "For Better or Worse: Using Film in a Study of the Holocaust" (*Teaching and Studying the Holocaust.* S. Totten, S. Feinberg, eds.) Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2001 p. 201.

CHAPTER 1

NIGHT AND FOG: EARLY HOLOCAUST RENDERINGS (1960s)

Introduction

In 1955, approximately ten years after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe, Alan Resnais released his short film *Night and Fog.*[16] The concept for the film, which describes the nightmare of the concentration camps, was suggested by the Comite d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, a group of professional historians based in Paris who specialized in the study of World War II.[17] The title is derived from the "Night and Fog Decree" of the German forces in December 1941 to destroy the resistance movements in the occupied countries of Europe.[18] The film itself combines black and white archival footage and still photographs with 1955 state-of-the-art color images. It loosely follows history beginning with the rise of the Nazis and continues through to the liberation of the camps in 1945. Not overly melodramatic, the film is accompanied by music written by Hanns Eisler. This chapter will look at the historical significance of *Night and Fog*, analyze the film's strengths and weaknesses, and look at two study guides available for use with the film. Several interviews with rabbis, educators, and resource

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[16] Although finished in 1955, the film was not released until the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. It was not widely seen outside of France until 1961, when English subtitles were added.

[17] C. Krantz. "Teaching *Night and Fog*" (*Film and History*). Cleveland, Oklahoma, 1985. p. 2

[18] This decree was so named because the suspected resistance forces were to be arrested in the middle of the night and "whisked away" into the fog to join the millions of others deported to the concentration camps.

librarians provide some insight into their experiences viewing and using the film. This chapter will argue that this film represents one of the earliest uses of archival footage as a means to universalize the Holocaust[19]. It will also argue that the film's bold portrayal of the Holocaust set the groundwork for later Holocaust films and documentaries. Resnais' film opened the way for later productions such as *Holocaust, Genocide* and *Schindler's List.* Despite the film's flaws, it remains a powerful educational tool to show students historical footage of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Historical Impact and Analysis of *Night and Fog*

During the film, the images of director, Alan Resnais, and the text of screenwriter Jean Cayrol reflect, ask questions and examine the records of the past and the present. They "offer up an essay. Moreover, by choosing to compress such enormous subject matter into only a half-hour [think, by contrast, of Claude Lanzmann's over-nine-hour *Shoah* (1985)), the filmmakers force themselves into the epigrammatic concision and synthesis of essayistic reflection."[20] The film's narrator does not

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[19] My use of the term "Holocaust" with an upper case "H" is anachronistic in this chapter, but I've decided to retain it for the purposes of convenience.
[20] P. Lopate. "Night and Fog," *Night and Fog: The Criterion Collection* DVD edition Argus Films, California, 2003. Lopate's brief commentary on the significance of *Night and Fog* can be found both in the insert comments for the Criterion DVD release of the film as well as online at Criterion's website. http://www.criterionco.com/asp/release.asp?id=197&eid=314&section=essay&page=1

leave the ending open for the viewer to question its veracity. Instead, the words are blunt and definitive: "Are their faces really different from ours?...We pretend to believe that all this could happen only in a particular country and in a particular time, but we do not think of looking around us, nor do we hear the endless cry."[21]

In the late 1950s, an attempt was being made to universalize and humanize the Holocaust. Doneson explains that "The results of the war, combined with the heightening of anti-Semitic feelings in the United States, had instilled the sense that 'it can happen here.' In the shadow of the European experience, filmmakers took it on themselves to explain to Americans the danger of anti-Semitism." [22]

From a European perspective, Resnais created a film meant to push his audiences, forcing them to experience the powerful images and listen to the blunt dialogue. The film encourages viewers to think about the past, the present, and the future of humankind. Ilan Avisar believes that *Night and Fog* "constitutes a cornerstone in the cinematic treatment of the Holocaust"[23] because of what it brings to the screen and the manner in which it utilizes words and images. He argues that it is "the most inclusive film about the concentration camp universe. In only thirty minutes Alan Resnais and Jean Cayrol provide a devastating picture of

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[21] Alain Resnais. *Night and Fog.* Janus Films under license from Argos Films (France 1956), Criterion Collection DVD United States, 2003.
[22] Judith Doneson. *The Holocaust in American Film* Syracuse. New York, Syracuse University Press, 2002 p. 49.
[23] Ilan Avisar. *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988 p. 6.

this world, achieving both a forceful documentary exposition and a serious scrutiny of its main problems."[24]

The production *Night and Fog* put Resnais, as a director, ahead of his time in dealing with the lingering questions and brutal images left in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The film caused political difficulties between the French and German governments for its depiction of Germans in the film. When released, despite winning the prestigious Prix Jean Vigo, the film was banned at the 1956 Cannes film festival along with a Polish documentary dealing with the Warsaw Ghetto, *Under the Same Sky*. The French foreign minister, Christian Pineau, eventually demanded that *Night and Fog* be withdrawn from the French lineup in response to protests from officials at the West German embassy and because Resnais included a small piece of archival footage (5 seconds) showing a French gendarme in a Vichy concentration camp. James Monaco, in his book on Alan Resnais, explains that "this visual evidence of collaboration was intolerable to the authorities. After two months of negotiations, the producers of the film agreed to alter the image (and the evidence of history) by covering the gendarme's uniform."[25] The government's concern with removing any visual reminders implicating France's role during the war fits with the film's overt ambiguity regarding responsibility. This ambiguity also reflects that of the French nation

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[24] Ibid. p. 12.
[25] James Monaco. *Alan Resnais*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1978 p. 22. Original parenthetical emphasis.

under the Vichy government and the German occupation. "Few heeded the call of De Gaulle who from his exile in London exhorted his countrymen to fight on. There was little resistance. Waving the banner of *Night and Fog* suggests that resistance was substantial."[26]

The omissions and inaccuracies of *Night and Fog* play a part in its historical significance. Resnais boldly uses the archival footage juxtaposed with contemporary footage to great effect. *Night and Fog* begins with color images of the remnants of a concentration camp, the barbed-wire fences in disarray against the placid background of some fields, a local road, barracks, and buildings ravaged by over a decade of weather and neglect. It then cuts to 1933, and with archival footage of Nazi parades, gives a brief history of the Nazi Party's rise to power. The narration explains the simplicity of creating the concentration camps, as normal as bidding on any construction project. The film moves slowly on a visual tour of the camps, switching back and forth between black and white archival footage of the concentration camps, deportations, trains, and images of the dead to color images of the camps, crematoria, gas chambers, barracks and clinics as they lay dormant less than a decade later.

By itself, the film's images are a powerful reminder of what humans can do and did to other humans. Resnais does not flinch in showing images of the emaciated living beings and the skin-and-bone

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[26] Krantz, p. 9.

dead. Resnais makes sure to show the pyres of bodies both piled up prior to burning and the charred remains, a basket of heads sitting next to their headless bodies, bulldozers shoveling hundreds of corpses into mass graves.

While showing these images, the film's narration never explains that the crimes were predominantly committed against the Jews of Europe. After showing a few of the torturers and their claims that they were not responsible, Resnais finally asks "Who is responsible?" This is the great question of the film, and Resnais points at the world as the responsible party for allowing the Nazi atrocities to occur unchecked for such a long period of time. In the universal message of the film, Resnais emphasizes how every human must take responsibility when atrocities of this nature and magnitude occur with so little protest from both within Germany and from other nations.

In addition to Resnais' use of powerful images, *Night and Fog* contains certain inaccuracies and omissions significant in understanding the directorial intent for the film. The film's largest, glaring omission is its utter lack of acknowledgement of the particular Jewish nature of the Holocaust experience. One might argue that the audience is expected to know about the Jewish involvement, for example, to be aware of the significance of the stars sewn to the clothing of the camp inmates. This does not, however, excuse or explain how the narration makes only one

spoken reference to a Jew in French, a reference deleted from the English subtitles entirely.

Charles Krantz, in addressing the use of *Night and Fog* as an educational tool, remarked that the director fails to "explain the apparent lengths the film goes to in order to avoid the forthright statement of the fact—that the Holocaust was first and foremost a Jewish experience."[27] Perhaps this quiet omission reflected the director's emphasis on the universality of the Holocaust opposed to showing it as a predominantly Jewish experience. The film's director himself admits that the message he tried to portray was one of universal suffering, of a need for vigilance against human injustice everywhere.[28]

Resnais consciously chose not to portray the Nazi atrocities in a Jewish context. Resnais and Cayrol utilized the archival images toward the universal message of the atrocities as committed against humanity. In a 1984 interview, Resnais declared that the whole point of the film was for it to be a commentary on the atrocities being committed at that time (1955) by both Algerian rebels and the French settlers in Algeria.[29] Ostensibly a documentary on Nazi camps, Resnais used their horrors as the foreground for an impassioned cry against the mounting atrocities

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[27] Krantz. p. 5.
[28] Ibid. p. 6.
[29] Krantz. p. 11.

committed by Algerian rebels and by the *colons*, the French settlers in Algeria."[30]

Using the historical "hook" of the Holocaust was a means to a political end for Resnais. Thus, the movie is perhaps most historically significant as an artifact of France in the 1950s, a France more concerned about the current events in Algeria than the French involvement in the events of the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust and the victimization of Jews living in France at the time. When the film was released, the wounds of France were barely healed from World War II. The atrocities against the Jews of France perpetrated by Frenchmen were a none-too-distant memory that the French felt best forgotten.[31] Krantz believes that "Though the actual proportion of convicted collaborators with the Nazis in France relative to other countries was not remarkable, France was remarkable for the eagerness with which anti-Semitic measures were pursued independently of Nazi pressures."[32] The film even includes footage of "Operation Spring Wind." On July 16, 1942, "Black Thursday," a French Police force of 9000 men, organized in arrest teams and

> aided by blue-shirted youth auxiliaries of the pro-fascist Parti Populaire Francais, rounded up 12,884 men, women and children (Jews who may have lived in Paris for some time but were not French citizens), and

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[30] Krantz. p. 11.
[31] The French, in serious denial about the Vichy government, preferred to see themselves as victims and later as liberators, not collaborators.
[32] Krantz. p. 14. See Robert Paxton and Michael Marrus, *Vichy France and the Jews*. New York, Basic Books, 1981.

> temporarily detained them in the Velodrome d'Hiver, Paris' cycling stadium, before dispatching them to the East.[33]

Neither the deportees, the Jews, nor the deporters, all Frenchmen, are specifically identified in the film. In this omission, the film allows Frenchmen to be mistaken for Nazis, and the deported foreign Jews appear as victimized Frenchmen. The film fails to express any opinion on the fact that these deportees, the foreign Jews in France at the time (not Jewish French citizens), were rounded up, deported, and murdered simply for being Jews.

Resnais' assertion that he wanted his film to be a warning to all people doesn't explain his omission of the Jewish aspect of the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Resnais disclosed to Krantz "that to have dealt with the fate of the Jews would have been inappropriate in that it might have diverted attention away from the universal message of vigilance that he wanted to convey, though he conceded the possibility of an error of judgment."[34] The film's historical inaccuracies and choice of omission in an attempt to universalize the Holocaust weaken some of the strength of the film. Certainly, if some details prove to be inaccurate, as Krantz indicates,[35] some critics might argue that other aspects may also be inaccurate or doctored.

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[33] Ibid. p. 6.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Krantz. Regarding the deaths of the 3000 Spaniards building a road, not steps as indicated in the film. Krantz believes this is significant in that "it illustrates that, while generally taking great care in the factual treatment of

Night and Fog provides a great example of a director using his authorial prerogative to shape the underlying message of a film. The film's inaccuracies and factual omissions do not take away from its visual strength and universal message. The power of the images and the length of the film increase its viability as a tool for Holocaust education in 2005 but require knowledge and explanation regarding the film's omissions. Krantz thinks this presents an interesting situation:

> In order to fully understand this film, we must consider not only the facts of the Holocaust as we know them, and how well they are portrayed here, but we must also raise the question of historiography. This is particularly important with regard to *Night and Fig* because of its strange failing to acknowledge the Jewishness of the Holocaust that is depicted in the film.[36]

Ultimately, *Night and Fog* remains a historically significant film that demands a full understanding of its strengths and weakness when used as a tool for Holocaust education. One cannot simply expect students or any audience to understand automatically what the film omits as they digest the powerful images of the Nazi atrocities. Resnais' desire to create this film as a warning to all people remains a valid point, but it avoids the significance of why the atrocities were committed in the first place. Perhaps if Resnais wanted to emphasize the atrocities being committed in Algeria, he should have shown the atrocities of the Holocaust along

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their subject, the filmmakers were capable of an impressionistic use of evidence." p. 4.

[36] Krantz. p. 11. Author's underlining.

with color images of the atrocities in Algeria rather than omitting the significant Jewish aspect of the Holocaust.

However, the universal terms in which Resnais deals with the topic reflect the ideology of the period. Doneson's extensive analysis of *The Diary of Anne Frank* indicates that Resnais' message fits into the 1950s theme of presenting the Holocaust as an act committed against all of humanity. Hollywood studios were less than encouraged by individuals in the Unites States government concerning the portrayal of the Jewish aspect of the war. During and following the war, Hollywood found itself caught between the desire to portray the events of the war and American perceptions of the portrayal of Jews in war films. In 1943, members of Harry S. Truman's Senate Committee, while hearing testimony on Hollywood's support of the war effort, made accusations about the origins of and ethnicity of some of the people employed by the major studios. Senator Ralph O. Brewster commented that "recent citizens were not appropriate film makers for the war effort, that the War Department should hang out a sign saying only 'seasoned citizens' may apply." Apparently, Brewster believed some writers, directors, and producers might use their positions to push the Jewish agenda in films depicting the war. In 1941, just prior to the war, Senator Gerald P. Nye, a staunch isolationist, called for an investigation of certain Hollywood films. He believed them to be pro-war propaganda aiming at bringing America into

the war. Nye stated that "the moviemakers were insufficiently American in origin, intellect and character."[37] Doneson notes that

> Difficult as it is to believe general resentment against the Jews increased during most of the war and reached a climax in 1944. Opinion polls in 1945, after the mass killings in Europe were common knowledge, showed that 75 percent of the respondents had not changed their attitudes toward American Jews. Paradoxically, during the war no one wanted to see films dealing with the persecution of the Jews in Europe; but after the war, according to a 1945 poll, 39 percent wished to see films of the horrors that took place in the concentration camp, 60 percent thought such films should be shown in cinemas throughout the United States, and 89 percent thought they should be shown to all Germans.[38]

Doneson states that the "continuing accusations aimed at industry leaders, insinuating that they were aliens—along with the government's emphasis on fighting the war together as Americans and the increasing anti-Semitism in the United States—go a long way toward explaining Hollywood's decision to avoid the subject of the persecution of the Jews."[39] While *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) represents an early example of the Americanization and universalization of the Holocaust, *Night and Fog* (1956) represents a European view of the war demanding universal vigilance.

Educational Use and Significance

After the film was released in an English subtitled version, in 1961, the film slowly made its way into U.S. history and social studies

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[37] Doneson. p. 47.
[38] Ibid. p. 49.
[39] Ibid. p. 47.

classrooms and provided a powerful account of the horrors of the Holocaust. When Resnais' banned film, *The Statues are Dying,* was pulled from a 1960 Cinema 16 program in New York City, it was replaced with *Night and Fog* and *All the Memory of the World*[40] marking one of the film's earliest distributions in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.

Documentation from educators who used *Night and Fog* during the earliest years of Holocaust education proved quite difficult to locate. Study guides for *Night and Fog* were available from 1981 and 1985 as well as two curricula utilizing the film in high school Advanced Placement (AP) history courses during the fall of 2004.[41] The evidence that exists regarding the earliest educational uses of the film is largely anecdotal, coming from students who viewed the film in religious schools or collegiate settings during the 1960s and 1970s.

Dr. Laura Kempton holds a doctorate in Education Leadership and has been teaching since 1985. She presently teaches at two Hebrew high schools in Connecticut as well as working one day a week with the Holocaust Education Center for Prejudice Reduction. In the late 1980s, Dr. Kempton, while teaching at the Chalk Hill Middle School in Monroe,

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[40] H. Thompson. "Cinema 16 Alters Dec. 7 Program" (*New York Times*) New York, November 1960.

[41] The guides referred to include Charles Krantz's article, "Teaching *Night and Fog*" as quoted extensively earlier in this chapter. Also Facing History and Ourselves (Boston) educational resource library provided a copy of the Social Studies School Service (Culver City, California) "*Night and Fog* Teacher's Guide" from 1981. This guide includes, of all things, a typed copy of the entire text of the film for clarification and study purposes. The Forsythe Country Day School curricula web sites are also provided later in the chapter.

Connecticut, helped produce the first edition of the Connecticut State Board of Education's teacher's resource guide, "Human Rights: The Struggle for Freedom, Dignity and Equality."[42] This guide incorporated Holocaust education for the state into a human rights and freedoms curriculum.

Night and Fog was Dr. Kempton's first introduction to the Holocaust in 1976. She recollected,

> I never learned about the Holocaust in public school and converted to Judaism later in my life. I remember being shown *Night and Fog* in a college course I was taking. Our professor didn't provide the class with any process time after viewing the film. I believe strongly that this film needs a lot of pre-teaching and isn't necessarily appropriate in its entirety.
>
> After twenty years of teaching, I believe it is critical that there be some careful selection of who teaches the Shoah. Many public schools think, oh the Jewish person should teach about it, but I've met many amazing Christian teachers teaching within their school systems throughout the United States. Some of the Jewish Orthodox institutions provide some of the poorest Shoah education I've experienced.[43]

Judith Magyar Isaacson, a Holocaust survivor, relates in her memoir how in November 1976 she was asked to speak on the Holocaust at Bowdoin College following a showing of *Night and Fog.* "I wanted to refuse, but could not. This proved fortunate: the powerful French documentary, *Night and Fog*, acted on me like a catalyst. That night I dreamt of Lichtenau, woke at five in the morning, sleepwalked to the typewriter and

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[42] Connecticut State Board of Education. *Human Rights: The Struggle for Freedom, Dignity and Equality.* Hartford, Connecticut 1987, 1998
[43] Dr. Laura Kempton. Phone interview March 16, 2004.

started to write."[44] This informal use of the film [as a precursor to her addressing an audience as a survivor of the Holocaust] released memories and experiences she had repressed for a long time. This allowed her to not only remember, but understand the importance of writing about her experience so that others may learn from her life.

During early research for this study, I discussed the films being analyzed with Rabbi Ruth Alpers who provided memories of her own educational experience viewing *Night and Fog*:

> I remember as a young child in religious school being shown the film *Night and Fog*. I believe it was a French documentary following the end of WWII. I recall that it is a black and white film that has some graphic scenes from the death camps. There is no doubt that I was traumatized by this experience. I'm guessing that I was somewhere around 4th grade when we were shown the film.[45]

In Rabbi Alpers' experience, the educators did not think about the appropriate age of viewers of the film. Rather they thought more about using the film as an educational tool to expose students to archival images of the Holocaust. Viewers of any age might feel traumatized by the experience. However, for educators to show the film to students too young to cope fully with the psychological repercussions is negligent.

Dr. Fred Krome, a lecturer at the University of Cincinnati and managing editor of the *American Jewish Archives Journal*, recounted a similar experience viewing *Night and Fog* in 1978, as part of a course

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[44] Judith Magyar Isaacson. *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor.* Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1990 p. x-xi.
[45] Rabbi Ruth Alpers. E-mail correspondence November 3, 2004.

covering the Holocaust during his junior year of high school, and in 1983 in a college course on World War II. Krome believes that "The rationale for showing this particular film was that . . . it demonstrated that more than just the Jews were victimized by the Nazis." Dr. Krome felt that his instructors "conflated" the Jewish experience with "other" groups, such as gypsies and that the film gives the erroneous perspective that all Nazi concentration camps had gas chambers. "In addition to my sense of horror, revulsion, and general paranoia that came from being reminded I was part of a 'victim group' (a predominant theme in synagogue education in the early 1970s), the chief thing I remember getting out of the film was the sense that the Nazis were systematic and super-organized. Now that I know that the Nazis were the anti-methodical group, it makes you appreciate the flaws in the film even more."[46]

In a recent *New York Times*, television critic Virginia Heffernan recalls seeing *Night and Fog* in the tenth grade during the 1980s in conjunction with a series of lectures on the Holocaust. She describes the powerful images she remembers from the film, severed heads and the heaps of corpses. However, she questions why, with so much history to learn, they spent so much time on the particulars of Auschwitz and the practices of the Nazis. "I couldn't help think that there was something about the Holocaust—or at least about the Nazis' cold efficiency—that we

[46] Dr. Fred Krome. E-mail correspondence November 11, 2004.

weren't meant to grieve, but to admire."[47] If the lessons themselves potentially alienate the students, these experiences emphasize a troubling aspect of Holocaust education. It speaks volumes about an individual's interpretation of facts and information and the manner in which they are presented.

Today many educators use *Night and Fog* in college and university curricula. How many religious or high schools continue to use the film is unknown. Carolyn Spencer, Chair of the social studies department, and a teacher at the Forsyth Country Day School in Lewisville, North Carolina, presently offers two social studies courses incorporating the film into her curricula.[48] At the University of Florida, Nora Alter used it in her course: "New German Cinema: 1945-Present," which studies how the Holocaust is represented in post-World War II European films.[49] Dr. Alter's course also included the study of *Jakob the Liar* (Germany 1974) and *Life is Beautiful* (Italy 1998). The University of Chicago offered the course "Topics in Film Music" which also studied *Night and Fog*, specifically the impact of Hanns Eisler's musical score in the film.

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[47] V. Heffernan. "Another Look at the Nazi Business of Killing" (*New York Times*). New York, January 19, 2005.
[48] Carolyn Spencer. Forsyth Country Day School 2004 Curriculum Guide. North Carolina http://www.fcds.org/academic/curriculum_guide/Social%20Studies/SS_906.htm & SS_905
[49] Dr. Nora Alter. ENG 4133 "New German Cinema: 1945 to Present http://www.english.ufl.edu/courses/undergrad/2002fall_up-d.html, Gainesville, University of Florida, 2002.

Spencer utilized films, including *Night and Fog,* in two of her social studies courses offered in 2004. One course focused on the question "What does it mean to be human?" through five thematic ideas: (1) man is self-conscious, (2) man is moral, (3) man is mortal, (4) man is social or relational, and (5) man is expressive or creative. The interdisciplinary course incorporates history, philosophy, religion, literature, science, art, and music.[50] When covering the period of World War II in this course, Spencer utilized Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Alan Resnais' film *Night and Fog.* Based on the five themes, the Holocaust fits into the question of mankind's morality and these sources both represent examples of artistic expression exploring mankind's morality.

Spencer utilized a methodology in which she had her students read texts, reflect on them, and discuss them in class. She offered background to the texts and ideas studied in the class. In addition to the lectures, slides and films were utilized to elucidate art and texts. An important part of the course was teaching the students how to think analytically about the Western tradition. Some classes were devoted to seminars led by students on given topics. Students were expected to put their thoughts down on paper in formal essays and reaction papers. Occasionally, guest speakers were invited to offer additional insight.

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[50] Spencer. Forsyth Country Day School 2004 Curriculum Guide. North Carolina http://www.fcds.org/academic/curriculum_guide/Social%20Studies/SS_906.htm

The instructor evaluated the progress of the students through unit tests, reading quizzes, essays, reaction papers, student presentations and projects, journal entries, and class participation. Students were required to keep a well-organized three-ring notebook of all handouts and class notes.[51] In this manner, Spencer gained an understanding of how the class as a whole was assimilating and responding to the materials and central ideas of the course. Her use of reaction papers and the other response methods indicates a positive intent to monitor the students' understanding and reaction to the presented materials. This strategy shows a respect for the power of the material as well as a desire to understand how the students felt about what they are learning.

Spencer also uses *Night and Fog* in her AP European History course.[52] In this course she utilizes a standard methodology incorporating reading and discussion of historical events and people using the college text and selected primary sources such as: *The Prince* by Machiavelli and *The Worldly Philosophers* by Robert L. Heilbroner. Students gave presentations using the primary source material and writing the occasional essay based on prior AP exam questions, both as in-class and take home assignments. Class time was also focused on analyzing essay topics and multiple choice questions based on past exams. Films recommended at AP workshops were shown. The films

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[51] ibid.

[52] Forsyth Country Day School 2004 Curriculum Guide http://www.fcds.org/academic/curriculum_guide/Social%20Studies/SS_905.htm

included *Michaelangelo: The Last Giant, The Prince, The Louvre: A Golden Prison, The Kremlin,* selections from *Young Catherine , Freud: The Hidden Nature of Man, Karl Marx: The Idea That Split the World, The Twisted Cross, Mein Kampf* and *Night and Fog.*

Naturally, different teachers who utilize *Night and Fog* in different settings will have different agendas. The use of this film in an AP history course will serve a markedly different purpose than the use of the film in a religious school setting. Many educators use *Night and Fog* because of the film's strong use of archival images. In a secular setting, the universal message of the film may fit an educator's specific unit goals. Considering the film's omission of the Jewish aspect of the Holocaust, however, an educator in a religious school setting might choose to select from the many other films that contain similar poignant archival footage, survivor testimonies, and focus on the Jewish context of the Holocaust.

The course's units explore European history from 1300 through the failure of Communism in the USSR. The curriculum does not describe the time spent covering the individual units. Assuming that Spencer, prior to showing *Night and Fog*, prepared her students with historical facts, significant dates, and important historical figures, one cannot truly prepare anyone for the images of the film. A skilled instructor would certainly explain the deficiencies of the film compared to other films. That is not the point of showing the film. Clearly, the point

is to show the atrocities inflicted on humans by the Nazis in some explanation of what occurred during World War II.

Many of the courses using *Night and Fog* are being taught by qualified educators with some background in film and/or Holocaust studies. One of the biggest fears of Holocaust educators is that films will be used out of context or by an educator lacking a strong film background and understanding of film. Judith Doneson suggests that there are "implicit obstacles in a society that is influenced by film, teachers included, yet is not media-literate."[53] Doneson points out how often educators choose films based on length to fit in the academic hour thereby negating the integrity of the creation and eliminating the use of longer films such as *Schindler's List* or Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. A film like *Night and Fog* might thus be chosen for its short length, when it should be discussed in terms of both its strengths: powerful imagery and the incredible use of juxtaposition between archival and modern footage, and weaknesses: omission of the Jewish context of the Holocaust and certain historical inaccuracies. *Night and Fog* provides a poignant look at the atrocities of the Holocaust and the perpetrators who had the gall to film their acts for posterity. A knowledgeable educator, able to point out the film's strengths and flaws, would find the film to be a powerful educational tool.

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[53] Judith Doneson. "For Better or Worse: Using Film in a Study of the Holocaust" (*Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*. S. Totten, S. Feinberg eds.) Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2001 pp. 194-195.

In 1981, the Social Studies School Service in Culver, California, prepared a *Night & Fog Teacher's Guide.*[54] The guide provides specific recommendations regarding age appropriateness, the proper preparation required prior to utilizing the film, and viewing considerations (showing the film in one sitting, utilizing two class periods to allow for pausing the film at key discussion points).[55] The guide warns instructors of the disturbing nature of the images and the possible reactions the film may elicit and the importance of allowing for follow-up activities, such as writing exercises and outside reading, to supplement class discussions. The guide provides a glossary of important terms as well as a comprehensive list of post-viewing discussion points. One of the most useful features of this guide is the inclusion of a translation of the film's entire text. This allows students to read the text after viewing the film to better understand the film's message and clarify any possibly missed points. The guide also corrects of some of the films historic inaccuracies such as the author using the figure "9,000,000 dead haunt this landscape," when the correct figure should be eleven million, i.e., six million Jews and five million non-Jews. The guide discusses the implications of the inaccuracies and suggests how individuals who deny

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[54] Social Studies School Service. *Night & Fog Teacher's Guide.* Culver City, California, 1981. Courtesy of Facing History and Ourselves (Boston) resource library.
[55] Ibid. p. 1.

the Holocaust use such errors to label films such as *Night and Fog* as "Hollywood fabrications and fake."[56]

Utilizing a discussion-based methodology, the guide offers a cohesive approach to the use of *Night and Fog* as a powerful educational tool. The guide shows a full understanding of the powerful images in Resnais' film as well as the implications of the film's historical inaccuracies. Its author's appreciation of how and when *Night and Fog* should be used as an educational tool exemplifies how understanding of the film and Holocaust education have developed over the two decades since the film's release.

Conclusion

Tracy O'Brien, Resource Library Manager for Facing History and Ourselves—Boston, gets about 35 requests a year from educators for *Night and Fog*. "I don't think it is appropriate for younger students," she explained. "It is fine for use for high school aged students, College students or adults. It is not my favorite film and I almost always try to discourage teachers who call to request it. It isn't a great film for Holocaust education. I've sometimes refused to lend it if I felt it was

[56] Ibid. p. 8

inappropriate for an age group or for what an educator wanted to accomplish."[57]

O'Brien explained that films provide an important tool within the pedagogy and methodology of Facing History and Ourselves. She believes strongly that no one film can tell the entire story, that film is one of many possible tools. She doesn't feel that film alone can do the job of educating students about the Holocaust.

> I don't think any one film covers the entirety of the Holocaust—Holocaust being the entire period leading up to the genocide, the aftermath, the Displaced Persons camps, the Nuremberg trials. These should all be a part of Holocaust education.[58]

Few individual films provide a concise understanding of the events and atrocities of the Holocaust. It is too much to expect that a film could fully elucidate an event with so many intricate facets.

Are educators knowledgeable enough to explain Resnais' directorial intent, the film's inaccuracies, and historical omissions? The strength of the images and Resnais' intentions speak out through time to emphasize the importance of memory and vigilance. Studying this film makes it apparent how much educators should know about a film before incorporating one into a Holocaust curriculum and how powerful images often stay with a student long after a class has ended.

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[57] Tracy O'Brien. Resource Library Manager for Facing History and Ourselves – Boston. Phone interview December, 1, 2004.
[58] O'Brien.

The evolution of Holocaust education matured rapidly in the United States in the years following the release of *Night and Fog* predominantly due to the 1961 world media coverage of the Eichmann Trial in Israel. The following chapter will look at the transformation of Holocaust perceptions and the changes in educational themes concerning the Nazi atrocities in the late-1960s and 1970s, as exemplified by NBC's television miniseries *Holocaust.*

CHAPTER 2

HOLOCAUST: THE STORY OF THE FAMILY WEISS: BRINGING THE HOLOCAUST HOME VIA THE SMALL SCREEN (1970S)

Introduction

The NBC miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* premiered in April, 1978, as a nine-and-a-half-hour drama that aired over four consecutive evenings. It was one of the earliest of the miniseries dramas, and an estimated 120 million viewers watched it nationwide.[59] Titus Films, an independent production company, created it. It was envisioned as an epic work, analogous to the highly praised *Roots* of the same genre.

Holocaust represented one of the largest catalysts of Holocaust education, "without doubt the most important moment in the entry of the Holocaust into general American Consciousness."[60] Its production and airing drew both criticism and accolades for how it portrayed the Nazi atrocities committed against European Jews. Scholars often mention the first broadcast of *Holocaust* "as a threshold event in the dynamics of Holocaust consciousness in America."[61] Peter Novick states that "more information about the Holocaust was imparted to more Americans over

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[59] Jeffrey Shandler. *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust.* p.155.
[60] Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life.* New York, Houghton Mifflin Books, 2000, p. 209.
[61] J. Shandler. "Schindler's Discourse: America Discusses the Holocaust and Its Mediation, from NBC's Miniseries to Spielberg's Film" in Yosefa Loshitzky ed. *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997 p. 153.

those four nights than over all the preceding thirty years."[62] Jewish organizations throughout the country utilized this opportunity to promote Holocaust programming. To promote the drama, the Anti-Defamation League distributed millions of copies of its publication *The Record*. "Jewish organizations successfully lobbied major newspapers to serialize Gerald Green's novelization of his television play, or to publish special inserts on the Holocaust. (The *Chicago-Sun Times* distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of its insert to local schools.)"[63] The American Jewish Committee, working with NBC, produced and distributed millions of copies of its study guides for viewers and educators.

This chapter will examine the historical and educational significance of *Holocaust*. I will analyze the impact the series made as an early televised Holocaust film as well as the impact its airing and promotion had on Holocaust education throughout the United States. I will provide an analysis of the film's plot and characters as well as some of the criticism leveled at the production. After analyzing the film, I will look at the companion educational material, analyze its content and goals and the historical impact of the materials and film on Holocaust education at the time. I will argue that *Holocaust* represents one of the most important cultural influences in the evolution of American Holocaust awareness. I will also argue that the profound impact of the

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[62] Novick. p. 209.
[63] Ibid. p. 210.

film on Holocaust education in America can be felt even today; *Holocaust* set the groundwork that made possible the success of *Schindler's List.*

Historical Impact and Analysis of *Holocaust*

Concerning the impact of *Holocaust*, Geoffrey Hartman wrote that

> There have been three periods when survivors of the Holocaust recovered their voice and an audience materialized for them. The first was immediately after the war, when the camps were disclosed. That period did not last: a devastated Europe had to be rebuilt, and the disbelief or guilt that cruel memories aroused isolated rather than integrated the survivor. . . . A second opening was created by the Eichmann trial in 1960, and a third came after the release of the TV series *Holocaust* in 1978.[64]

Holocaust continued a process encouraging survivors to talk about and share there experiences in Europe. The miniseries started a creative wave of Holocaust cinema and education whose impact can be felt to this day. The historical significance of the TV miniseries is twofold: first, the widespread television viewership it received, and second, the lengths to which NBC went to integrate the educational aspect of the miniseries into American life and its effect on Holocaust education around the world. Certainly NBC hoped to profit from the series, but *Holocaust* also had a strong social component. Not only did NBC seek to attract viewers, there was also an underlying desire to bring an important historical event to the forefront of American consciousness. The network went

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[64] George Hartman. *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996 p. 143.

beyond its usual advertising campaign, tapping some of the foremost Jewish educators to develop a viewer's guide, educational curricula for different school ages, as well as printing a paperback novelization of Gerald Green's teleplay.

Advance screenings of the mini-series were offered to Jewish and Christian clergy. These leaders were encouraged to make the Holocaust their topic of discussion in their churches and synagogues. In a marked effort to maximize the viewing audience, NBC was sensitive to the Jewish calendar, broadcasting the miniseries one week before the celebration of Passover, with the final episode airing on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.[65] Presumably, the telecast was meant to bring families together across the nation "for a simultaneous, extended encounter with the story of the Nazi persecution of European Jewry. *Holocaust* promised to offer a portrait of Jewish family and community life on a scale never before seen on American television."[66] *Moment* magazine even published a feature article on the miniseries stating, "for Jews, the watching has about it the quality of a religious obligation."[67]

The fictionalized story focuses on the experiences of the cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class, German-Jewish Weiss family and the rise of a mid-level bureaucrat, Erik Dorf, within the Gestapo apparatus of the Nazi party from the mid-1930s until the end of the war. In the

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[65] Shandler. *While America Watches* pp. 163-164.
[66] Ibid. p. 163.
[67] "Watching *Holocaust*" (*Moment* 3, no. 5). Washington, DC, April 1978 p. 34. As quoted in Shandler see above footnote.

melodramatic fashion of television dramas, each primary character's destiny brings him or her to various Holocaust "landmarks": the Warsaw Ghetto, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Theresienstadt, and Babi Yar as well as a Russian partisan unit. The fictional characters are intermingled with actual historical figures, and the production also incorporates Nazi-era footage and slides to give a historical feel to the plot.[68]

At times, critics have described the drama as "the climax of the process of the Americanization of the Final Solution" as well as being "among the first popular films to focus on the Final Solution as a specifically Jewish event."[69] It has been hailed as "the prototype for all succeeding – and successful – television projects on the era."[70] Shandler points out that "such acknowledgments usually focus on the role of the miniseries in familiarizing mass audiences with the Holocaust as a discrete episode of modern history in which Jews figure significantly and centrally."[71] It is more likely the miniseries, after the popularization of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in all forms, acted as a middle stage in the Americanization of the Holocaust culminating in 1993 with the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the release of *Schindler's List.*

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[68] Shandler. pp. 160-161.
[69] Judith Doneson. *The Holocaust in American Film* Syracuse. New York, Syracuse University Press, 2002 pp. 143, 149.
[70] M. Elkin. "Holocaust as a Media Event," (*Jewish Exponent*) Philadelphia, March 14, 1986 p. 31.
[71] Shandler. "Schindler's Discourse: America Discusses the Holocaust and Its Mediation, from NBC's Miniseries to Spielberg's Film" in Yosefa Loshitzky ed. Op. cit. p. 153.

The themes and emphasis within Holocaust education have continually evolved since the end of World War II. Rona Sheramy explains that after the war, educators taught about the "European Jewish catastrophe" in a manner that emphasized popular ideals and values in order to inspire Jewish affiliation.

> In the 1940s and '50s, within a cultural climate that heralded victory and courage, we have seen that this approach led to a focus on heroism; from the 1960s through the mid-1970s, against the backdrop of a society interested in issues of victimization and racism, this strategy led to an emphasis on the Holocaust's lessons regarding social justice. But beginning in the late 1970s educators came to see study of the Holocaust as a *primary vehicle* in the mission of building Jewish identity, rather than simply an aspect of the Jewish school program which needed to conform to this goal.[72]

As Holocaust education increased in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the Eichmann trial and a greater availability of books and films on the subject, some academics began to worry about how the Holocaust was being taught. Shandler comments that, "By this time concern in the academy had shifted from the quantity of attention paid to the Holocaust to its quality. Scholars began to analyze the dynamics of responses to the Holocaust in scholarship, literature, film, fine arts, and popular culture as phenomena of Jewish culture and of general American culture."[73] The airing of the miniseries helped further the Holocaust education movement in the 1970s more than any one book, play, survivor

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[72] Rona Sheramy. *Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education.* Ann Arbor, UMI Dissertation Services, 2001 p. 95.
[73] Shandler. p. 157.

testimony, or film at that time. Thought to be one of the largest causes for renewed awareness, the miniseries brought the atrocities of the Nazi regime into hundreds of millions of homes throughout the world.

When it was shown in Germany, it brought to light the violence and intent of the Nazi regime about which little had been spoken, let alone taught, in the German school systems since the war's end decades earlier. "In Germany the program destroyed a taboo and compelled new widespread interest in the subject and a reassessment of attitudes toward the national past."[74] One critic commented: "Germany has been enriched by a new American word 'Holocaust,' which simultaneously covers the Jewish genocide, the TV movie and its personalized tragedy, and the emotional and political reactions it promoted."[75] The film prompted many educational systems throughout the world to begin including Holocaust studies in classrooms prior to college level.

Despite the series' success and widespread viewership, many critics panned the production and criticized it for trivializing the Holocaust, for watering down the Nazi atrocities and the victims' experiences to an appropriate level for home audiences. Many critics questioned the possibly problematic translation of this major series of

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[74] Avisar. *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable.* p. 130.
[75] J. Bier. "The Holocaust and West Germany: Strategies of Oblivion 1947-1979" (*New German Critique* 19 Winter) Ithaca, 1980, p. 129.

events to television. Elie Wiesel denounced it as turning an "ontological event into soap-opera."[76] Lance Morrow, writing for *Time*, wrote

> one senses something wrong with the television effort when one realizes that two or three black-and-white concentration camp still photographs displayed by Dorf [fictional SS officer] – the stacked, starved bodies – are more powerful and heart-breaking than two or three hours of dramatization. The last fifteen minutes of Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, in which Italian Jews are rounded up to be taken to the camps, is more wrenching than all the hours of *Holocaust*.[77]

Morrow has a point in that *Holocaust* plays flat to its audience. The production's concern with educating its audience about the historical events often plays a stronger role than the characters caught up in those events. In this, the production focuses on the confusion and uncertainty of the times and the fact that many Jews did not know what to make of the laws or violence leveled against them until it was too late. In portraying the chaos of the times, the miniseries succeeds. However, in emphasizing the significance of the historical events surrounding the lives of the Weiss and Dorf families, the plot undermines its own intentions rather than fully allowing the stories of the two families to tell themselves. In films such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Schindler's List*, and *The Pianist*, the stories of the people drive the plots of the films. The historical events influence the actions and reactions of the characters, but the portrayals show the characters very much within their lives and

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[76] Shandler. p. 168.
[77] L. Morrow. "Television and the Holocaust" (*Time*). May 1978, p. 53.

the choices they make regarding the violence and uncertainty surrounding them. The miniseries, however, portrays its characters caught up in the uncertainty of the rising Nazi violence until they are swept away to various significant historical moments most of which end in their destruction.

One of the miniseries' defenders, Peter Sourian explained how Gerald Green "had to attract people in an escapist frame of mind to a real and repellant business. And thus, ironically, contradictorily, he had to make it in some sense or other *attractive* . . . Green's *Holocaust* is thus, finally, false, yet it gets some of the important facts across, because in its falseness it moves the prime-time viewer who is otherwise uninterested, and carries him to the end. If it were not false, it could not do so."[78]

The Weiss Family

As a televised drama, the film presents its characters as Holocaust archetypes in order to show as many historical "moments" as possible. While realistically families did experience many different facets of the Holocaust, in this fictionalized account the nature of the medium and presentation force the experiences of its characters in such a manner that emphasizes the importance of the places sometimes more than their fictionalized experiences. The dramatic plight of the Weiss family and the significance of the historical events surrounding their lives and the lives

[78] P. Sourian. "Television" (*The Nation*) New York, 226 no. 24 June 1978, p. 773, emphasis in original.

of the Dorf family are not allowed to flow as much as serve as stopping points.

The Weiss family represents an archetypical, assimilated German Jewish family that is extremely proud of its German heritage and has left behind much of its Jewishness. Josef Weiss, the father, is a secular Jew and a medical doctor. His Judaism plays no role in his daily life. Herr Palitz, Dr. Weiss' father-in-law, is proud of his German heritage and his heroic role during World War I that earned him the Iron Cross. Berta Weiss, Josef's wife, assures herself and her family that sanity will return to Germany before the war affects her family, steadfastly refusing to abandon her country and heritage at the threat of harm from the criminal sorts running the country. She maintains her denial until it costs her family all chances of buying their way out of Germany. The mere fact that the family would have to buy their way out of Germany at this point does not begin to explain the extreme difficulty the Weiss family would have had emigrating, even if they had decided to leave earlier. Because Berta Weiss vehemently insists her family remain in Germany, no attempt is made to portray the difficulty European Jews had in obtaining visas and immigrating to other countries. In this, the production simply attempts to portray the mindset of a German citizen refusing to believe that her country could betray her and her family to the point of exterminating them simply because of their Jewish heritage/religion. The Weiss family, as fully assimilated German Jews,

attempt to depict the difficulty families had in choosing to leave everything they knew and loved. In the face of the ever-increasing violence and regulations against the Jews, the family still believed the chaos would end, reason would prevail, and the Nazis would eventually be removed from power. Shandler believes that the

> devices used in the miniseries conform to the protocols of American Holocaust television, which had been taking shape since the early 1950s. The focus on a bourgeois, assimilated West European Jewish family as the dramatic point of entry into the vast expanse of the Holocaust recalls dramatizations of Anne Frank's diary, while the use of romantic love to represent the dramatic antithesis of warfare, hatred, and genocide is reminiscent of *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* and Paddy Chayefsky's 1952 play *Holiday Song*.[79]

The miniseries shows the Weiss family feeling equal, believing they fit quite well into a society they embraced, a society into which they had been born. The first scene of the production shows the Weiss' eldest son, Karl, marrying a Christian woman without any hesitation or protest from his parents while a friend of the bride's family expresses his racist views of the marriage. Despite their assimilation and pride in their German heritage Josef, and a later Berta, are deported from Berlin to the Warsaw Ghetto, after witnessing Kristallnacht. There Dr. Weiss becomes a member of the Jewish Council. From Warsaw, both are transported to Auschwitz where they are murdered. Karl is sent to Buchenwald, Theresienstadt, and then to Auschwitz. The Weiss' daughter, Anna, loses her mind after being raped by German soldiers. She is sent to the asylum

[79] Shandler. p. 161.

in Hadamae, where she is gassed to death with the other mentally disabled and physically-challenged patients. The Weiss' other son, Rudi, escapes from Germany to Prague, where he meets Helena. Later he joins a partisan unit in the Soviet Union where he is wed to Helena who is later killed in the fighting. Rudi is eventually captured by German soldiers and sent to Sobibor where he participates in the prisoner revolt. Rudi is the only family member who survives the war and is shown heading for Palestine at the film's end.

The ending of the miniseries attempts to draw the connection between the destruction of the Jews, the Zionist movement, and the future founding of the Jewish state of Israel, in 1948, a few years later. Rudi, finishing a final conversation with his Christian sister-in-law, is shown joining a group of Greek orphans playing soccer that he has agreed to escort to Palestine. This ending represents a theme found in both Holocaust education and films. John J. O'Connor in his article criticizing the commercialization of the miniseries attacked this portrayal by explaining how

> many scholars, again Jewish and non-Jewish, dismiss most connections between the Holocaust and the founding of Israel as a comforting myth. International postwar guilt probably hastened the formal process, but the future of Israel was fixed long before Hitler. By the time of the war, more than a half-million Jews were already living in the Palestine area."[80]

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[80] J. O'Connor. "TV: NBC 'Holocaust,' Art Versus Mammon" (*New York Times*) New York, April 20, 1978.

One could argue, however, that guilt for the Holocaust as well as the enduring post-war refugee problem helped secure enough votes in the United Nations for the partition of Palestine. It is historically significant then that as an "American" movie it buys fully into the "Destruction-Redemption" narrative where Israel redeems Auschwitz, giving some meaning to the Holocaust. Green uses this theme to tie the attempted destruction of the Jews with the successful fight and founding of the Jewish state. He draws a connection between the surviving remnant of European Jews and their hope of creating a Jewish state both to provide a happy conclusion and to imply that the creation of the Jewish state was a direct Jewish response to the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews. The concluding dramatic moment plays for the sake of television, to allow viewers to think all will be well for Jews and Christians since the forces of evil have been defeated. The Nazis have been destroyed, some Jews survived the Nazi plan, and the creation of a Jewish state is just over the horizon. In contrast to the message of *Night and Fog*, the ending of *Holocaust* attempts to assure audience members that they do not have to worry about a repetition of the atrocities depicted.

The Dorf Family

The Dorf family is portrayed as the antithesis of the Weiss family. Erik Dorf is dominated by his "scheming, opportunistic"[81] wife who

[81] Edya Arzt, ed. *Holocaust: Booklet Five: Family Home Viewing Guide.* p. 4.

encourages him to join the Nazis. Dorf is the father of two adoring boys, the older glibly explaining to his younger sibling that Nazi/Christian propaganda concerning the Jews' role in the murder of Jesus Christ justifies hatred of Jews. The portrayal of the Dorf children depicts how completely German families bought into the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Nazi propaganda and historical Christian prejudice against the Jews as the murderers of Jesus Christ.

Seen through the lens of gender, the miniseries is revealing in yet another way. The wives in both families come in for harsher treatment as characters. Dorf's wife is willing to sacrifice all that she knows is good in her husband for the opportunity to climb in status and wealth; Marta exists as the driving force behind Erik and his success. Berta, meanwhile, stands as the grounding force that keeps the Weiss family in Germany ensuring almost everyone's demise. This is significant in its attempt to portray on a small scale the thought process that occurred in Gentile and Jewish homes throughout Germany and Europe at the time.

Dorf serves as the archetype German bureaucrat who rises in the ranks as a German officer in the Gestapo, willing to follow orders obediently. Doneson believes that Green

> achieves considerable success in his portrayal of the German characters. They are not the stereotypes to which we have become accustomed in film and television. There are no phony German accents. Rather, Green portrays the Dorfs as an object lesson in the banality of evil. Thus, Erik Dorf is not bad. He is simply out of a job and so joins the Nazi party. Eichmann, Dorf, Heydrich and others are

> rather businesslike as they formulate plans for the Final Solution.[82]

The portrayal of Dorf received a great deal of criticism. Lance Morrow, in his criticism of the miniseries, points to the "story of Erik Dorf, a prissily murderous family man and SS officer around whom nearly all the horrific deeds of genocide have been densely crowded."[83] Dorf's character is based on the actions of Otto Oblendorf, a lawyer and economist, who admitted during the Nuremburg trials to overseeing the destruction of ninety thousand Jews in the Crimea.[84] Doneson believes that this depiction of blame upon one character represents how "the Israeli government turned Eichmann into the symbol of all those who planned for the destruction of European Jewry."[85] Of course the collapse of several historical characters into a single fictional character is a typical television device. It allows for heightened drama and better storytelling.

Dorf's character witnesses the Wannsee Conference, the killing operations of Einsatzgruppen in Eastern Europe, and the massacre at Babi Yar. He embodies the "typical German" attempting to belong and participate in all facets of something in the end he knows to be morally wrong. During the first night, Erik, torn between old relationships and new ones, warns Dr. Weiss, his family doctor, to stop treating Aryans and leave Germany if possible. Dr. Weiss does not heed his advice

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[82] Doneson. p. 157.
[83] L. Morrow. "Television and the Holocaust" (*Time*). May 1978.
[84] G. Green. "A Wreath on the Graves of the Six Million" (*TV Guide*). California, April 15, 1978.
[85] Doneson. p. 157.

believing that the German people would eventually stand up against the brutality of the Nazi regime and return sanity to the nation.

Dialogue and Characterization

Viewing the film more than two decades after its initial airing and after numerous viewings of European and later American Holocaust films exposes the contrived and clichéd nature of some of the dialogue. In 1978, however, this dialogue offered important insight into the minds and lives of assimilated German Jews who might have been able to save themselves if only they had foreseen the dire circumstances of their future.

The pivotal scene, during which, Dorf warns Dr. Weiss to leave the country, inspires Dr. Weiss to broach again the subject of leaving Germany with his wife Berta. Berta, meant to be the archetypal German-Jewish woman, holds onto her belief in Germany as a nation of culture and civilization as Dr. Weiss begins to understand the threat of the Nazis to his life and that of his family. Dr. Weiss pleads with Berta to see the violence surrounding them. "Maybe we should make the move. We should have left three years ago." Berta replies, "We are no good at these games. I told you when the attacks began 'This is my country as much as theirs.' I do not fear those barbarians." In the end, she expresses her true

belief. "We will survive. This is the land of Beethoven, Schiller and Mozart."[86]

Berta maintains her belief that culture and civilization will win out over barbarism, hatred, and violence. She believes that the Germany in which she grew up still exists and will stand up to the men attempting to destroy it. Berta's voice represents every voice of denial and disbelief as she retreats to her piano-playing that highlights the transitions from the first night up to the point when the entire Weiss household is handed over to a German doctor and Berta, Anna, and Rudi are forced to move into their Christian daughter-in-law's family home. Gerald Green, intending to create drama within the miniseries to draw viewers in, creates dialogue meant to inform viewers of the thinking of the assimilated Jewish family as they descend into the Nazi hell.

While it might be easy to join the critics of the late 1970s who complained that the miniseries trivialized the events of the Holocaust, this groundbreaking series opened the way for directors and artists to create such films as *Genocide; Europa, Europa; Schindler's List; Life is Beautiful; Playing for Time; Shoah; Skokie;* and *Wallenberg: A Hero's Story.* The miniseries emphasized that the story must be told and retold. It emphasized the need for the Holocaust to be studied and talked about in an attempt to understand and prevent it from every happening again. Perhaps having a plethora of superior Holocaust films to choose today

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[86] Marvin Chomsky, director. *Holocaust.* California, Titus Productions 1978, World Vision Home Video 1988

represents the greatest indication that the point of the miniseries is/was lost on many of its critics.

Holocaust Knowledge in America (1978)

Professor Byron Sherwin of Spertus College in Chicago participated in helping create the companion study guides for *Holocaust*. During a phone interview, he discussed the state of Holocaust knowledge in America when the miniseries was produced:

> The miniseries was the first real exposure through television to the American people about the Holocaust. Not only did Jews know little about it, but I think it was the first time it hit the American public. We were very cognizant of this. How would non-Jews react? Would they believe it happened? We felt it was important to have in the study guide some discussion of the historical facts behind the docudrama. We felt that it was important that there was a firm historical basis behind the docudrama that these were things that actually occurred. I had to explain the simplest things like that the Second World War was against the axis. We couldn't assume people new anything because they didn't.[87]

If educators worried that non-Jewish viewers wouldn't believe the depiction of some of the events or even have significant knowledge concerning World War II, how much more must Gerald Green have been concerned as the writer? Concerns of educators were not baseless either. In April of 1978, members of the Christian Defense League in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, protested the airing of the miniseries in front of the offices of the local NBC affiliate. One protestor believed that the

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[87] Professor Byron Sherwin. Phone interview January 5, 2005.

miniseries exaggerated the number of European Jews destroyed during the war. She claimed, from her own reading, that one million Jews, not six million, were killed by the Nazis.[88]

Professor Sherwin explained how many Americans—people who had not experienced the Holocaust—thought the miniseries was a blockbuster. The film captivated audiences and created a tremendous amount of Holocaust awareness. Survivors, on the other hand, said, "[I]t was historically inaccurate," according to Sherwin. "They were focusing on things the average American wouldn't even take cognizance of, like how the actual uniforms in Auschwitz looked."[89]

At the time, though, few educators, scholars, survivors or historians believed that a television broadcast could portray the atrocities of the Holocaust with such accuracy that audiences would understand what European Jews actually experienced. Professor Sherwin explained how he and his colleagues hoped the audience would be able to identify with the process of death and extermination, but "the thing that they reacted to the most wasn't the gas or concentration camp scenes or the scenes with Meryl Streep's character having sex with the Nazi soldier

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[88] "Pickets at TV Studio Protest 'Holocaust'" (*New York Times*) New York, April 17, 1978. Work cited in article A.R. Butz. *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: The Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*. Originally published privately in 1976. Reprinted (Location unknown) Theses & Dissertations Press, 2003.
[89] Sherwin. Phone interview.

[Muller] to get better treatment for her husband. The separation of the families; that was the thing they could identify the most with."[90]

Professor Sherwin believes that the camps and exterminations were beyond what audiences could imagine. He says, "they [the audience] couldn't make any emotional links to it. . . They had no reference. If it [the miniseries] was trying to reach people it was a flaw to focus on experiences that had no frame of reference of identity for people watching it."[91] Two and a half decades later, despite the existence of the national Holocaust museum and mandated Holocaust education in several states, ignorance of the Holocaust remains a major concern for educators.

Professor Sherwin believes that "Even today I am not sure people understand the significance of it [the Holocaust]. I doubt even today that people can understand it. Now we are a generation later, so certainly the kids today have even less of a reference point allowing them to understand the experience of the Holocaust."[92] Professor Sherwin believes that a backlash has occurred against the continual use of the Holocaust by Jews to affect the opinions of non-Jews about the Jewish people and Israel.

> Educators in the 1970s who wanted to show it [the Holocaust] was a Jewish experience have now lost their agenda. Many Christians don't want to hear about it anymore. In interfaith relations, it was used as a kind of manipulative tool, to make non-Jews feel guilty, to change their views on Israel. They are tired of it. I see now

[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

> a backlash occurring. In terms of its effectiveness and bringing forth the goals many of us had then, it hasn't worked.[93]

Seeing the original broadcast in 1978 at the age of nine, I remember that the subject matter was of the utmost importance to my family. Inaccuracies and the possible trivialization of the events were not concerns at the time. I was amazed that Jews in any way were being depicted on the television, let alone their plight during World War II which saw the destruction of six million European Jews.

Up until that time, despite the fact that I had lost family during the war, my knowledge of the Holocaust was very limited. My maternal grandmother had made a single reference regarding family members killed during the Holocaust. No names were offered, just a few titles: an uncle, a cousin, relatives lost at a great distance of time and space, never to be spoken of even in remembrances. It seemed incredible to me then, knowing little or nothing about the Holocaust, to sit with my parents at home and view a dramatic interpretation of the events in Nazi Germany and war-torn Europe, to discuss how those events affected our lives and the Jewish people.

The creators of the miniseries portrayed some of the horrors of the Holocaust without pushing viewers away with more disturbing images of the atrocities. The images portrayed are no less disturbing just because they were viewed on television: the depiction of Kristallnacht; the rape of

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[93] Professor Byron Sherwin. Phone interview January 5, 2005.

the Weiss' youngest daughter, Anna; the men of a Jewish community being herded into their Synagogue to be burned alive by Nazi Storm troopers. Many scholars, educators, critics, and survivors considered these images trivialized because there is no manner in which to express the truly atrocious nature of these events. It would be a greater travesty, however, if no depictions were attempted for fear of failing to achieve complete accuracy. Without representations of the historical events and atrocities, the events might dwindle to memories in memoirs and images in rarely seen archival footage and slides. Shandler comments: "critics generally assume the presentations of the Holocaust on American television to be essentially flawed." He echoes Ilan Avisar's belief that, despite "an inherent incapacity when it comes to dealing with the subject of the magnitude of the Holocaust," the 1978 miniseries demonstrated that the medium's "formidable power . . . [Television] can be instrumental in enlightening ignorant people about the course and nature of the Nazi evil."[94]

The end goal of the production, of course, was viewership. A side concern was turning the miniseries into a teachable moment, which historically initiated a movement to increase Holocaust awareness and education throughout the nation and the world. Despite the early criticism that this kind of depiction would "profane" the "sacredness" of

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[94] Shandler. p. xvi, quoting Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 129.

the Holocaust, I truly believes that in the end, the means were certainly justified.

Shandler believes that the miniseries' use of the archival footage and slide images "demonstrates the wide recognition of these images both as signs of historicity and as morally charged icons."[95] Their inclusion infuses the historical fiction with history. They present a reminder of the past for those familiar with the images and offer a stronger look into the past to those first learning about the Holocaust. The problem may be that in such a lengthy production these historical artifacts appear for the briefest of moments and might be considered part of the fiction by the uneducated. Morrow asserts that the archival materials provide more emotional power in the few images shown than the entire contrived plot of the rest of the production.

Watching the drama on video without commercial interruptions removes a layer of the original controversy. Airing the production with commercial interruptions caused outrage from critics who felt them to be unsuitable following some of the more disturbing depictions. *New York Times* writer John O'Connor wrote an entire article on the subject, explaining how big sponsors like International Business Machines, Xerox or Mobile "tend to stay away from anything emitting controversy." This forces television networks to "do business as usual, and in the case of *Holocaust*, that means a slew of commercials punctuating a story of

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[95] Shandler. p. 163.

sadistic torture and prolonged suffering. The effect can be absurd. Following a scene designed for maximum tragic impact, we are confronted with a dazzlingly chic Angie Dickenson offering wine or a perky Sandy Duncan hawking crackers in the middle of a farm field."[96]

Other critics, after listing the miniseries' flaws, gave it credit for the response it generated. Lawrence Langer, while critical of the miniseries, admits that

> viewers here and abroad were grateful for this manageable version of the Holocaust, and ironically, through the universal medium of television, worldwide interest was renewed in a subject that seemed to have dropped from public view. But the sheer brutality of the event was shielded, and the Technicolor horror that audiences saw, though mildly disturbing, did not threaten to displace mental comfort with nightmare.[97]

In 1972 Elie Wiesel said: "the theme of the Holocaust is no longer taboo. It is now discussed freely."[98] Putting the images of the Holocaust on television opened it up to extensive discussion. The reaction to the broadcast of the miniseries was historically significant. Volumes of articles were written in the weeks and months following the broadcast, and, similar to the intended outcome of *Night and Fog*, writers used the lessons of the Holocaust as a springboard to address issues of the day: persecutions in the Soviet Union, Uganda, Iraq, and Cambodia. The widespread discussion of the miniseries spanned religious divides—the

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[96] J. O'Connor. (*New York Times*) New York, 1978.
[97] Lawrence Langer. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*, Oxford University Press, New York 1995 p. 9.
[98] Shandler. p. 82.

movie impacted Christians and Jews alike, as well as in the secular realms of American society. Since its original airing, the miniseries has been re-broadcast in the United States a number of times, aired in countries throughout the world and released on video cassette.[99]

In *Americans Confront the Holocaust—A Study of Reactions to NBC-TV's Four Part Drama on the Nazi Era,*[100] the American Jewish Committee sought to gauge audience reactions to the miniseries three weeks after the airing through telephone interviews. Interviewers called 822 people, 411 who had seen the miniseries and 411 who had not. Sixty percent of those who had viewed the miniseries said that yes, watching the series made them understand better what Hitler's treatment of the Jews was all about. More than a third said no. Eighty-three percent of those interviewed felt it was a good idea to present a program such as Holocaust. Eighty-three percent of the viewers and fifty-six percent of the non-viewers felt it was a good idea to present the series on television. Sixty-five percent of all respondents felt it was a good idea to teach children about things like what the Nazis did. More than three-quarters of those who felt it was a good idea for children to be taught about the Holocaust felt that children should receive this education in the schools. Only eight percent felt it should be taught in church or synagogue. This

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[99] Shandler. pp. 165-167.
[100] American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations. *Americans Confront the Holocaust – A Study of Reactions to NBC-TV's Four Part Drama on the Nazi Era.* New York, December 1978.

last answer is one that has perhaps haunted Holocaust educators the most. If the lessons learned from the Nazi atrocities are not taught in religious schools, but instead are presented as "mere" history in the public school systems, what happens to the study of the Jewish context of Holocaust? Much of Holocaust education in 2005 revolves around moral choices, such as the Facing History and Ourselves program, and, indeed, is taught in religious as well as public schools, which may demonstrate that the AJC survey was not ignored. Educators have gleaned lessons from the broadcast of *Holocaust* and thus refined and improved Holocaust education ever since.

Today this film is no longer readily available, and its running time of 7.5 hours makes its use as an education tool very difficult. The film stands as an emblem of its times. Critical opinion aside, the miniseries utilized the medium of television to broadcast a historical event in a fictionalized manner, because that is how the producers and writers felt it would best affect the understanding of a nation. Broadcast directly to homes the miniseries reflected the importance of the television medium at that time. Unlike cinematic film, which would require much more audience effort (film length, travel, and expense), the medium of brought the story of the Holocaust to the public at no monetary cost to audiences. This was the heyday of network television (before cable television dispersed the demographics) as the "people's medium," and as such, NBC gained widespread viewership with great flexibility of time. Despite

its flaws as a televised drama, over 120 million people watched the series. Jewish families gathered together to teach, learn, and remember. Religious leaders held discussion groups and spoke of the importance of watching the series to their congregants. The show reached more people in a single week than anything prior to its production.

Even with the miniseries' overall success, critics still felt it necessary to emphasize its failings. Langer explains where he believes the miniseries fails,

> The failure of *Holocaust* is a failure of imagination. The vision which plunges us into the lower abysses of atrocity is not there. . . .We see well-groomed and sanitized men and women filing into the gas chamber, but what does this convey of the terror and despair that overwhelmed millions of victims as they recognized the final moment of their degradation and their powerlessness to respond? Perhaps art will never be able to duplicate the absolute horror of such atrocities: but if it cannot recreate at least a limited authentic image of that horror—and *Holocaust* does not—then audiences will remain as deceived about the *worst* as young Anne Frank's lingering words on the essential goodness of human nature deceive us about the *best.*[101]

Despite Langer's belief that *Holocaust* failed to recreate even a limited authentic image, the miniseries at least created an image viewed by many people who felt it was important to view something dealing with the Holocaust, to learn something about the Holocaust. Perhaps few, if any, viewers expected to understand how the experience felt. Perhaps few even imagined that a dramatic endeavor could possibly recreate fully authentic images of the horror of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, many

[101] Langer. p. 175-176.

viewers appreciated the opportunity to view anything on such a large scale that depicted the Holocaust. The miniseries provided educators, religious leaders, and families with an educational tool that created an opening to study and learn about the atrocities committed by the Nazis. As a modern viewer, I feel that whether *Holocaust* can serve in a present-day classroom is no longer important. The film's significance lies in its role as an entry point into the world of Holocaust education.

Educational Use and Significance

Prior to the production of *Holocaust: The Miniseries* the national director of Inter-religious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee's, Institute of Human Relations, Rabbi Marc H. Tannenbaum, reviewed the script and made revision suggestions. The AJC subsequently published a Viewer's Guide for discussion in classrooms and other group settings that NBC-TV distributed to teachers and to civic and church groups all over the United States. This was unique in terms of American television, certainly in terms of scale as well as content.

At the same time, the AJC arranged numerous previews for religious educators and leaders of labor, black and women's organizations, many of whom helped call the TV series to the attention of their contacts and members of their organizations. AJC chapters worked to set up a conference on teaching about the Holocaust, one chapter

created an exhibit at a college library, and another conducted a high school essay contest on the moral lessons of the Holocaust.[102]

> Educators and community leaders of all backgrounds also made watching the *Holocaust* mini-series an educational imperative: the National Education Association distributed the official NBC Study Guide, prepared by the American Jewish Committee, to teachers across the country, and the United States Catholic Conference Division of Film and Broadcasting and the Communications Division of the National Council of Churches prepared study guides for use in parochial schools.[103]

The educational press kit incorporated five study guides created as a National Jewish Interagency Project. Six leading Jewish educators and rabbis from around the United States worked together to create the five educational booklets. The educators were Professor Sherwin of Spertus College in Chicago, Illinois; Alan D. Bennett, a Jewish educator at Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple of Cleveland, Ohio; Bea Stadtler, author of the textbook *The Holocaust: a History of Courage and Resistance,*[104] and renowned Jewish educator from the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies in Cleveland, Ohio; Edya Arzt from the Women's League for Conservative Judaism in New York City; Rabbi Richard Israel from the Hillel Foundation of Greater Boston; and Stephen Bayer of the Jewish Welfare Board in New York City. Together they created a comprehensive packet of

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[102] American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations. *Americans Confront the Holocaust – A Study of Reactions to NBC-TV's Four Part Drama on the Nazi Era.* December 1978 p. 3.
[103] Sheramy. p. 98.
[104] Bea Stadtler. *The Holocaust: a History of Courage and Resistance.* New Jersey, Behrman House, 1974.

introductory materials and educational guides utilizing the airing of *Holocaust* as a means to foster historical and sociological discussions and Holocaust education throughout the country.

The first booklet provides an extensive introduction to the material, educational suitability in terms of age, and recommendations for the individual study guides, a list of the major characters, and plot summaries for each evening's individual airing. A historical outline of events lists key historical figures responsible for the events of the Holocaust as well as brief definitions of key terms and events portrayed in the film. The outline of the film incorporates significant dates, facts, and historical figures important to understanding the background of the film.

The remaining four booklets offer educational guides for grade school children, teenagers, adults and college students and a family home viewing guide. Professor Sherwin and educator Allan D. Bennett co-authored the first booklet of the educational packet consisting of introductory materials which provided the introductory material for as broad a base of facts as possible concerning the time surrounding the Holocaust. They wanted people who used their guide to gain a fundamental understanding of the historical events that took place, some of which would be depicted in the miniseries. Sherwin remembered that the development of the study guides as well as Holocaust education in general at the time "was all really from scratch. No one had done

anything like this before. Now it is an industry. Then it was all a *tabula rasa.*"[105]

The introductory guide even includes almost two dozen documentary and non-documentary media recommendations in the areas of the Jewish Community of Eastern Europe, The Holocaust: A Documentary Overview, Resistance, and Remembering that might be used in conjunction with the miniseries. Film recommendations include *Night and Fog* (Janus Films 1956), *Memorandum* (Anti-Defamation League1966), *Genocide* (Anti-Defamation League1975), *The Warsaw Ghetto* (American Jewish Congress), *Judgment at Nuremburg* (United Artists 1961), *Jacob the Liar* (East Germany 1976), and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (United States 1959).[106]

Bea Stadtler prepared *Booklet Two: Study Guide for Grade School Children.* Both *Booklet Two* and *Booklet Five: Family Home Viewing Guide* include the section she prepared titled: "Issues for discussion," which offers conversation points for educators and families. These guides include age guidelines as well as basic guidelines for using the mini-series as a teaching tool. *Booklet Two* recommends orientations should be provided for all educators and group leaders with the goal of discussing the whole miniseries, various view points, and the relationship of this topic to the educational goals of the institution. The

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[105] Sherwin. Phone interview.
[106] National Jewish Interagency Project. *Holocaust: Booklet One: Introductory Material.* p. 22.

guide also recommends that educators and group leaders be shown *Memorandum* or *Night and Fog* "to help staff understand and discuss the impact of media on the learning process."[107] It is interesting to note that the educators themselves were concerned about the medium becoming the message. Stadtler wanted to ensure that educators were aware that the study guide was only a guide and "not a complete lesson plan for teaching the Holocaust to children."[108] She emphasizes that the study guide is only an introduction for further Holocaust study and that educators must be able to respond to the emotions students may display. Most importantly she believes it is imperative that educators not leave students with the "feeling that death and destruction are all there is to Jewish history and identity."[109]

Stadtler's methodology utilized discussion points for pre- and post-viewings of the miniseries for each night. Her pre-viewing discussion points for part one focused on assimilation, exclusion, rights and civil liberties, the Nazi abuse of words such as "resettlement" and "relocation," bystanders, and German propaganda. The post-viewing discussion options included eight trigger points from part one dealing with the assimilation of the Weiss family into German society, approaches to issues that might affect Jews or minorities in a negative way, *Mein*

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[107] Stadtler. *Holocaust: Booklet Two: Study Guide for Grade School Children.* p.2. Entire Press kit located in the Tannenbaum collection, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

Kampf, the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, the request by Neo-Nazis to march in Skokie, Illinois, who should have challenged the government and what happened to those who did, functioning among bystanders and a world without justice.

Stadtler used the same format for each airing of the show: a list of points to be covered in a class prior to the airing of each night followed by a list of questions concerning the previous night's episode and talking points for pre-viewing and post-viewing conversations. Post-viewing questions for the first episode included what it might feel like to live in a ghetto, the hierarchy of leadership within the ghettoes, and the definition of a hero and the representation of heroes in the miniseries. Post-viewing questions dealt with more specific details from the movie itself: the responsibility of religious leaders to speak out, the differences between today's urban ghettoes and the Jewish ghettoes of Nazi occupied Europe, the significance of Babi Yar, and definition of conscience. Each post-viewing discussion delved further into the significance of the details of the episodes and into the actions portrayed both by the Jews and the Germans in the miniseries. Her use of this methodology allowed educators and group leaders to guide their groups carefully through the significant historical details of the Holocaust as well as analyze how the events were portrayed in the miniseries and what could have been learned from both. Despite the difficult topic matter, the study guide was accessible and easy to use.

Alan D. Bennett created *Booklet Three: Study Guide for Teenagers.* He understood the treatment of the Holocaust in public school education, outside of special courses, as part of the larger topic of World War II and American history. He believed that little if any attention was paid to the "special and unique impact of that event on Jews, and even less on the meaning of the Holocaust for Jews today."[110] He felt that addressing the second generation of post- Holocaust students held great importance for Jewish educators' pedagogic efforts. "For today's young students—indeed for many teachers and group leaders—the events of the 1930s and 1940s may as well be ancient history. For them, Haman, Hadrian and Hitler melt into a faceless form that spells trouble for Jews, but which is not clearly perceived or easily identified."[111]

Bennett and the educators who worked together to create the study guides understood the need for greater Holocaust education throughout the country. They also understood the potential for *Holocaust* to influence how the Jewish community perceived the importance of Holocaust education. Bennett concluded his preface describing the hope "that the NBC 'Holocaust' special will enhance this process by increasing the interest of Jewish youth in this part of the history of their people. This study guide has been designed to help Jewish institutions of all

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[110] Alan D. Bennett. *Holocaust: Booklet Three: Study Guide for Teenagers.* p.1.
[111] Ibid.

kinds transform this 'media event' into a deeply serious Jewish experience for teens."[112]

Bennett used a discussion point-based methodology, for he understood that educators and group leaders could not possibly cover every historically significant moment within the miniseries. Thus, he provided a list of twenty-six possible trigger questions so that discussions might focus on an educator's individual goals. The questions included topics such as international indifference and media silence concerning the plight of the Jews during World War II, armed resistance, the Nazi idea of racial purity, the significance of Babi Yar, the Jews as scapegoats, and many others.

Bennett strongly believed that any discussion of the Holocaust with teenagers should

> not end with teens feeling that death and destruction are all there is to Jewish history and identity. It is up to the teacher or group leader to balance this experience for youngsters by in some way sharing his own vision and sense of excitement for what is positive and joyous in Jewish life.[113]

This guide provided a list of goals for educators to consider. In addition to determining the extent to which the group understood facts of the Holocaust, the guide also helped to reveal thoughts on the meaning of their Jewish identity, define faith and belief, understand the relationship between the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel, and learn

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

about the fundamental conditions of Jewish existence throughout the world. The guide also recommended, as did all the guides, that training sessions should be held for educators and group leaders, but with special emphasis on the impact this viewing will have on teenagers.

Bennett understood how to work with teenagers and to teach in informal settings. Understanding the difficulty of time and location compounded with the specific material, Bennett offered in his study guide a comprehensive but loose structure that could be molded to fit any group's needs. Rather than dwelling on individual moments within the miniseries, this guide used it as a springboard to talk about the larger issues at hand concerning the Holocaust and the Nazi attempt to exterminate every European Jew. Written with an understanding of the teenage intellect, the study guide relied on the ability of teenagers to extrapolate the historically important themes from the fictional context of the miniseries.

Dr. Stephen Bayer, Richard J. Israel, Barbara Fask, Jack Mayer and Byron Sherwin worked together to produce *Holocaust: Booklet Four: Study Guide for Adults and College Youth.*[114] Stephen Bayer, then coordinator for Adult Services at the Jewish Welfare Board, created a list of six programming alternatives based on the broader educational experience of the age group. The list offered ideas for lectures or panel discussions, multi-media presentations, courses that might be offered,

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[114] S. Bayer, R. Israel, B. Fask, J. Mayer, B. Sherwin. *Holocaust: Booklet Four: Study Guide for Adults and College Youth.*

do-it-yourself projects for groups and individuals, experiential programs, and additional local and community projects for individuals.

Richard J. Israel formulated the programming suggestions for college students. Believing that college students would be highly interested in viewing the miniseries and/or learning about the Holocaust, he offered suggestions for groups gathering to view the series. Using a discussion-based methodology, he created lists of discussion questions formulated specifically for the different nights of the airing of the miniseries.

Barbara Fask, Director of Young Women's Leadership Cabinet and Jack Mayer, Consultant on Leadership Development for the Council of Jewish Federations, created the section on leadership development. She expressed the belief that "the Holocaust is the symbol of most of the issues that are generally confronted in any leadership development curriculum and it is an event that has had a profound impact on our conception of ourselves and our feelings about the world around us."[115] Utilizing a methodology that broke up larger groups into smaller groups for discussions and topic explorations they provided different topics of discussion, such as Jewish leadership as viewed in the miniseries and how direct action might have altered certain situations if Jewish leaders had rallied all German Jews to protest against early Nazi anti-Jewish policies. They suggested bringing in survivors as group leaders to discuss

[115] Ibid. p. 3

emotional reactions to the program and the reality and fiction of the miniseries. They also recommended veteran community leaders meet with the group to discuss recollections of the American Jewish response to the Holocaust. Last, they recommended using an academic resource person to research some of the broader themes of the Holocaust such as assimilation, psychological anti-Semitism, and Jewish resistance.

These booklets demonstrate NBC's genuine desire to serve the public interest. Years later, the network also helped historians distill the intended message of the miniseries. These booklets also serve as artifacts of the 1970s. The authors of the booklets focused on providing families and educators with a concise content of the historical events surrounding the Holocaust. The content of the guides focused on the prominent theme of the era, detailing the victimization of the Jews. They focused on topics such as defining racism, rights and civil liberties, the Nazis misuse of words as propagandistic devices, and the definition of a hero. The guides used the miniseries and the events depicted in it as a springboard for discussions about assimilation, Christian anti-Semitism, and understanding of the term "ghetto." Dr. Irving Greenberg states in the introduction that the Holocaust teaches "the absolute moral necessity of a strong and committed world Jewish community and

Jewish state. Thus no one can make accurate or adequate political judgments today unless they first encounter the Holocaust."[116]

The discussion-based methodology used in the guides for grade school students and for family home viewing focused on creating a general awareness of the events of the Holocaust. The guides used the miniseries as an entry point to discuss the actions of Dorf as a Nazi bureaucrat and the Weiss family as an example of an assimilated German Jewish family. Rona Sheramy comments how Jewish educational materials at the time discouraged assimilation. She explains how, "Jewish educational materials consistently discouraged assimilation and stressed the need to maintain Jewish affiliation."[117] Bea Stadtler discussed this issue in the miniseries' study guide for grade school children.

> Dr. and Mrs. Weiss and their family were assimilated Jews 'absorbed' in, and part of the general German population. A good indication of this assimilation lies in the fact that Karl [the Jew] married a German non-Jew and this did not bother his parents at all. What can we learn from the TV program about those who wanted to forget or who hid the fact that they were Jews?[118]

Sheramy argues that "Such a question suggests that the benefits of assimilation are illusory; in the face of anti-Semitism, even assimilated Jews such as the Weisses suffered a terrible fate."[119]

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[116] Irving Greenberg, "Introduction" (*Holocaust Booklet One: Introductory Material*). New York, National Jewish Interagency Project, 1977 p. 1.
[117] Sheramy. p. 117.
[118] Stadtler. *Holocaust: Booklet Two: Study Guide for Grade School Children.* p.3.
[119] Sheramy. p. 117.

Assimilation continued to be a large concern during this period as the rate of intermarriage continued to increase. All of the study guides suggest that assimilation provided no refuge during the Holocaust attempts to emphasize the need for a strong Jewish identity as a rebuke to the Holocaust and those who tried to destroy European Jewry.

The guides for teenagers, adults, and college students took a deeper look into the significance of the Holocaust. Both guides recommended that groups talk with survivors and members of Jewish organizations in order to hear firsthand experiences of the victims and about the American Jewish response during World War II. An exploration of broader social themes is also incorporated into the guides, recommending the exploration of Jewish resistance, the theological implications of the Holocaust, and the relationship between the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. The guide questions the Nazis' fierce hatred of the Jews: "During the Holocaust the Germans condemned the entire Jewish people to death for the 'crime' of existing. There was to be no exception, no way out for any Jew, regardless of what he or she believed or did."[120] The guide goes on to ask, "Why such total hatred? What did all the Jews represent that the Nazis hated so fiercely?"[121]

These statements further the underlying attempt of the study guides to discourage assimilation. The guides use the portrayal of the

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[120] Alan D. Bennett. *Holocaust: Booklet Three: Study Guide for Teenagers.* p.3.
[121] Ibid.

Weiss family as assimilated German Jews to show that the Nazi hatred of Jews spared no one regardless of their German family heritage, service to Germany during World War I, contribution to German society, or social status.

The guides approached the subject from the standpoint that the audience/students knew nothing about the events depicted or the significant historical details concerning those events. The emphasis placed on teacher training reminds the reader that at the time there really were no workshops, no educational seminars, no books, no centers of learning—indeed, there was very little that focused entirely on the Holocaust. Few educators who had made the study of the Holocaust their life's work. Professor Sherwin explained the culture of the time:

> Remember, in those times (working on creating the study guides in 1977) hardly anybody talked about the Holocaust. There weren't chairs in Holocaust studies and centers or museums of the Holocaust. There was nothing. I remember the first international Holocaust scholars' conference. We joked that someday there would be museums with gift shops.[122]

The writers of NBC's study booklets wisely saw the need for greater Holocaust awareness and began to fill it, paving the way for a fuller and more comprehensive Holocaust educational movement throughout America.

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[122] Sherwin. phone interview.

Conclusion

Viewing *Holocaust: The Miniseries* twenty-seven years after its first airing, after viewing films such as *Schindler's List* and *Europa, Europa* was difficult. As we have seen, the film's flaws in character portrayal and dialogue are jarring while the depictions of the atrocities committed maintain their poignancy. But aside from all the flaws, *Holocaust* must be understood as a watershed event that catapulted the plight of the Jews during World War II into the consciousness of the nation if not the world. *Holocaust* opened the door to a wealth of questions, learning, and educational opportunities for an entire generation of Americans as well as populations throughout the world. As representations of historical events, the depicted atrocities lose none of their power. The depictions remain painful and disturbing. While more accuracy and realism might have assuaged some survivors and critics, the production might have run the risk of being unmarketable and losing its audience. This was not the goal. *Holocaust* earned its place in history by bringing the Jewish agencies, organizations and educators together and setting them on the path to teach as many people as possible about the Holocaust and its significance, a catalyst for Holocaust education for the next decade if not longer. It earned its place in history by bringing knowledge to Jews and non-Jews alike concerning events that affect the entire world to this day.

CHAPTER 3

GENOCIDE: DOCUMENTARY IMAGES FOR THE 1980S

Introduction

In the wake of the national response to the airing of *Holocaust*, educators, organizations, and institutions capitalized on the newfound interest in Holocaust studies to increase educational programming, create lecture series, and publish articles. Over time, the Holocaust moved from a peripheral educational subject into the mainstream as a distinct course of study "requiring special pedagogical methods and a separate place in the curriculum"[123] in religious schools and institutions of education throughout the nation.

In 1979, Rabbi Marvin Hier proposed to the Board of Trustees of the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles that they produce a "major multimedia presentation on the Holocaust."[124] He had two reasons for doing so: first, to remind the current generation of the atrocities, and second, to cultivate personal identification with and empathy for the victims. Rabbi Hier explained:

> A new generation too young to remember the Holocaust now makes up the majority of the population and they

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[123] Rona Sheramy. *Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education.* Ann Arbor, UMI Dissertation Services, 2001 p. 57.
[124] M. Hier. "Postscript: The Making of the Film Genocide" in Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes eds. *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust (A Companion to the Film Genocide).* Chappaqua, New York, Rossel Books and Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1993 p. 432. also available at the SWC website http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/resources/books/genocide/postscript.html.

> need to know about the nature of the world they have inherited. Perhaps even more importantly, most of the films on the Holocaust, while careful to document the horrors, fail to capture the essence of the lives that were lost—who these people were and what values they lived by. I felt that this approach was essential, since it was the only way we could motivate young people to study the Holocaust. Unless the viewers could personally identify with the victims, it would be difficult for them to empathize with their fate.[125]

Thus, *Genocide* was born. Rabbi Marvin Hier and Martin Gilbert, professor of history at Oxford, wrote *Genocide*. Arnold Schwartzman, who was brought on board as director, also co-authored the screenplay. Originally, *Genocide* was a production combining film and stills and using multiple projectors and screens to create a truly multi-media effect. It was considered so well composed that the creators were urged to convert it to film. In doing so, it was felt, it would be accessible to more audiences. The producers hoped the film would "become the centerpiece of Holocaust education programs in high schools and universities."[126]

What is unique about *Genocide* is the intimate, poetic style of the script, which leads the viewer down paths of personal stories. Within this personal connection, those unfamiliar with the history of the Holocaust, the film's primary audience, can find their connection. The beautiful accompanying score lends a sense of drama and dignity to the production. Orson Welles and Elizabeth Taylor, two celebrities who lent their famous voices free-of-charge in order to be a part of the project,

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[125] Ibid.
[126] D. Shribman. "New Film on Holocaust Has Premiere in Capital" (New York Times). New York, January 18, 1982.

narrate the film. The power and imagery of *Genocide* helped it to win the 1982 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. In 1983 the Simon Wiesenthal Center published *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust,*[127] edited by Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, as a companion volume for the film. This volume was followed by the publication, in 1987, of *A Teacher's Guide to the Film Genocide*[128] produced by Dr. Michael Zeldin.

This chapter will look at the historical significance of *Genocide*. It will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the film, the companion volume of essays, and the study guide. I argue that this film represents a response to NBC's airing of *Holocaust* in an attempt to provide a historically accurate and emotionally engaging documentary to be used in educational settings. The powerful content of the film provides detailed historical facts combined with artistically rendered personal accounts of victim and survivor experiences to create a connection between audiences and the past. The combined use of all three resources allows for a comprehensive unit on the history and ramifications of the Holocaust.

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[127] Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds. *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust (A Companion to the Film Genocide).* Chappaqua, New York, Rossel Books and Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1993.
[128] Dr. Michael Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the film Genocide.* Los Angeles, Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1987.

Historical Impact and Analysis of *Genocide*

During the late 1970s, the Simon Wiesenthal Center became aware of a great dearth of understanding and knowledge about the Holocaust in America among both Jews and non-Jews. Holocaust education, while given a boost by the airing of the miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978, had obviously not reached large segments of the population. *Genocide* was an attempt to fill the void. Because the miniseries had so many shortcomings, the documentary makers sought to avoid making the same mistakes. Rona Sheramy comments on the response of many educators and organizations stating:

> In the case of the *Holocaust* miniseries, memos regarding the program's shortcomings circulated throughout the Jewish organizations, resulting in calls to respond to such distortions. "Needless to say," declared one such memo from Shimon Frost, Director of the National Curriculum Research Institute, to executives of the Central Agencies for Jewish Education, "the NBC series *Holocaust* is not a Jewish program, created with a clear Jewish educational objective, and our involvement in creating educational materials does not constitute an endorsement of the program, its content, style and thrust. The TV series can, however, be the starting point for a meaningful inclusion of Holocaust studies within our school curricula."[129]

More than likely, the critical response to *Holocaust* influenced the approach taken by Rabbi Hier, Martin Gilbert, and Arnold Schwartzman in creating a historically accurate and emotionally engaging documentary. Rather than premiering in Hollywood, California, the film

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[129] Sheramy. p. 105. references comments from Shimon Frost to Executives, Central Agencies for Jewish Education, 15 March 1978, Box 11, Holocaust-Telecasts, JESNA Papers, YIVO.

was first shown at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. .[130] It is historically significant that unlike the other three films in this written analysis, *Genocide* was created specifically as an educational vehicle and is the only film that was a completely not-for-profit endeavor, funded by both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Rabbi Hier recounts a special connection made between Frank Sinatra and Simon Wiesenthal during the fund-raising phase of the project. Reluctant to ask for his donation, Wiesenthal held back until pressed by Sinatra. "Why would you want to hide something like that from me?" Sinatra asked. "Although I'm not Jewish, the Holocaust is important to me."[131] This led to Sinatra donating the first $100,000 and subsequently raising an additional $400,000 for the film. The significance of this contribution, from a non-Jew, marks a shift in American Holocaust awareness as even non-Jews began to see the significance of carrying forward the memory of the Holocaust. Paradoxically, this was a period that saw Jewish organizations and educators changing how they defined the Holocaust from the universalistic focus of the 1950s and1960s to a more particularistic focus on the specific Jewish nature of the Holocaust.

The Academy Award for this documentary was unprecedented for a Holocaust film. The true acceptance of not only the production but the subject matter lent a great deal of credence to the film and increased the potential audience with the extensive exposure it received. *Genocide*

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[130] D. Shribman. Op. cit.
[131] Hier. Op. cit.

continued the process of bringing the Holocaust even further into the American mainstream consciousness, a trend which was gained momentum only a few years earlier by NBC's *Holocaust*.

As the publicity brochures for the film clearly state, the creators of *Genocide* felt their film to be almost a response to the criticism of *Holocaust*: "Each and every one of its 5133 seconds is completely, historically accurate. The Wiesenthal Center painstakingly searched the archives of the world, uncovering new historical material. It unearthed thousands of feet of previously unseen film footage and stills. Every fact, every story was cross-checked and corroborated."[132] The emphasis on the film being "historically accurate" also speaks of Rabbi Hier's concerns for Holocaust denial, which also became more pronounced, though relatively marginal during the late 1970s. Some publications and groups began to question the veracity of the Holocaust and filmmakers, writers, and even survivors of disseminating propaganda as part of a Jewish conspiracy. Peter Novick believes that Rabbi Hier's fears were disproportionate and even absurd.

> The argument for raising Holocaust consciousness that has been advanced with the greatest urgency is, by any sober evaluations, the most absurd: the alleged necessity of responding to the tiny band of cranks, kooks, and misfits who deny that the Holocaust took place. Concern about the "growing influence" of this corporal's guard was widespread for a time, but now seems to be abating. [133]

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[132] Simon Wiesenthal Center. *Genocide* Publicity Brochure, Los Angeles, 1982.
[133] Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life*. New York, Houghton Mifflin Books, 2000 p. 270.

Novick considers the "star" of American Holocaust denial to be Arthur Butz. Butz is an associate professor of electrical engineering at Northwestern University. In 1976, he arranged privately to publish *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: The Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*. His publication drew a small following of supporters. The *New York Times* even referred to Butz's book in an article concerning a protest of Baton Rouge's local NBC affiliate against the airing of Holocaust because of "its exaggerated death totals."[134] Novick also describes the publishing activities of the Institute for Historical Review in California. He contends that while the activities of these "fruitcakes were irritating, indeed infuriating," the lack of evidence that they had any influence countered the call by some to take them more seriously.[135]

Rabbi Hier aired his concerns regarding deniers in 1982. During his speech commemorating Yom HaShoa at the State of California's first joint Legislative Commemoration of the Holocaust, Rabbi Hier said,

> And now my friends there are ominous voices heard saying that it never happened; teachers, so-called professors, even a new journal. But worse, much worse than the haters is the feeling, and not merely that of a minority, that it is time to get on with civilization; to put behind our crematoria, to erase our Eichmanns, to focus on the arts and sciences and to go further along in our

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[134] "Pickets at TV Studio Protest 'Holocaust'" (*New York Times*) New York, April 17, 1978.
[135] Novick. p. 270.

> journey into space and our understanding of the environment.[136]

Novick comments that sentiments like those of Rabbi Hier were rampant in the early seventies. "In the early seventies there was a good deal of talk about a rampant 'new anti-Semitism' in America, of the need to remind both Jews and gentiles of the Holocaust in order to combat it. I've argued that at the time the claims about a new anti-Semitism were nonsense; certainly they're nonsense today. While anti-Semitism will probably always be with us, their influence, insignificant twenty-five years ago, is even more insignificant now."[137] As dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations[138], Rabbi Hier would understandably take the claims of deniers seriously and continue to emphasize the importance of Holocaust education and awareness in the United States. The importance of the Holocaust is not only a part of his belief system but the central focus of his work.

Prior to the release of films such as *Night and Fog; Sighet, Sighet; Shadow of Doubt*; and *Genocide* the predominant thought was that documentaries had to be impersonal accounts of historical events or real people. Annette Insdorf comments in her book *Indelible Shadows* that

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[136] Hier. State of California's first joint Legislative Commemoration of the Holocaust. April 30th 1981.
[137] Novick. p. 269.
[138] Simon Wiesenthal Center website. http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=fwLYKnN8LzH&b=245494&ct=294112

these films "use 'documentary' footage such as newsreels and interviews, but are in fact as formally rich as the best 'fiction' films: they contain a narrative spine, poetic sinews, an edited pulse, and a profoundly personal voice."[139] Some of the positive aspects of *Genocide* include the interesting manner in which the material is presented. The film uses extensive montage sequences of archival photographs showing Jewish life and history and the events leading up to the war. The film uses beautiful animation to accompany the reading of Pavel Friedman's poem "I Never Saw Another Butterfly." Paintings and archival film clips also help to create a visually stunning portrait of both European Jewish heritage and the horrors of the Nazi annihilation of the European Jews. The vocal talent of Orson Welles and Elizabeth Taylor add emotional and dramatic tension to historical events and personal accounts to make the details and experiences more personal to its audience. Welles narrates the majority of the historical details of the film while Taylor provides emotional vocals for the personal testimonies of both victims and survivors.

The beginning of the film provides a detailed historical description of the Jewish presence throughout Europe and the lives they constructed for themselves over centuries in some places, millennia in others. Utilizing images of paintings and archival photographs, the film creates a vivid tapestry of the lives of the European Jews while surrounded by

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[139] Insdorf, Annette, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, Vintage Books, New York 1983, p. 177-178.

hostile non-Jewish communities. The film explores this heritage as it describes the essence of anti-Semitism experienced by the Jews and the historical violence inflicted upon them eventually leading to the Nazi attempt to exterminate their presence from all of Europe. The images of the film paint a picture of the wealth of Jewish culture, architecture, and study that was wiped out by the Nazis. The film moves rapidly through the historic background of the Jewish presence in Europe, so much so, that it seems to provide too many details in a small amount of time. It moves so quickly that, at times, it proves to be difficult to digest the significance of it all.

The middle of the film deals with the rise of the Nazi party in German politics through World War II and the Nazi atrocities perpetrated against the European Jewish populations. It provides a detailed account of Hitler's rise to power and his policies against the Jews leading to the establishment of the concentration camps and the implementation of the "Final Solution" as a means of making Germany and most of Europe "Jew Free." This ominous presence is juxtaposed with all that Jews had contributed to German culture, science, arts, and medicine that was hated and destroyed by Hitler and the Nazis. Images depict the propaganda posters of the Nazi regime and the educational propaganda used to indoctrinate the children and the German people. It describes extensively the boycotts and violence aimed at the Jews.

The film mentions briefly the countries that stood by without raising immigration quotas for both German Jews and other European Jews. It mentions the 400,000 unfulfilled immigration quotas left empty by the United States. The film combines the Nazi march across Europe with the discriminatory acts and violence leveled against the Jews throughout Europe. It touches briefly on the few countries that attempted to assist the Jews. The film's message is unequivocally clear: European Jews were victimized while almost every nation and Christian religious organization stood by and did nothing. The few non-Jews who attempted to do anything are worth mentioning. The film presents Raoul Wallenberg and describes his selfless, solitary actions that enabled the survival of 40,000 Jews. But in the end, the Jews were left to their own fate.

Countering the idea that all European Jews went passively to the slaughter, the film presents images and accounts of partisan units and resistance groups. The underlying message of the film, however, emphasizes that Jews must be vigilant in the present based on the fact that the whole of the non-Jewish world was against them during the Holocaust, either actively seeking or passively accepting their destruction.

Elizabeth Taylor narrates personal testimonies of survivor and victim experiences after the film begins describing the establishment of the ghettos in Poland. These narratives give emotional testimony of the

atrocities committed against the Jews to accompany the already powerful images of the film. Describing the Nazi invasion of Russia, the film describes and shows images of the killing pits in Eastern Europe, the work of the Einsatzgruppen. Taylor's descriptions of the shame of one family as they are stripped and shot in front of each other is accompanied by images of the shame inflicted by the Nazis prior to shooting the victims.

Here *Genocide* begins to strengthen the personal connection between the victims and its audience. The hope and despair of the testimonies carry the prayers and aspirations of those destroyed to the audiences as witnesses. For Jews watching the film, the role of witness is meant to strengthen their understanding of their fortune at being alive and their responsibility to carry on the memories of those exterminated. For non-Jews in the audience, the film depicts the atrocities that hatred, intolerance, and inactivity lead to and may lead to again.

While the film's powerful images depict the atrocities in a moving manner, some of these images pose problems when using the film in an educational setting. The film uses some images of nudity to show the complete degradation inflicted on the victims prior to being killed by the Nazis. It isn't clear if these images provide any great understanding for younger audiences who might have difficulty with the nudity and certainly the violence accompanying it. It creates a dilemma: how should one deal with the overpowering though perhaps necessary images of

nudity and death? How does an audience, let alone an audience of students, reconcile these elements?

The content of some of the archival footage may be difficult for audiences to fathom. How does a modern audience of youth relate to the personal accounts of the victims while ensconced in their own American lives of freedom that insulate them from even the small pockets of anti-Semitism and hatred that exist in America? Without a frame of reference, many students may not be able to draw the connection to the history. Students have difficulty understanding the relevance of historical events from thirty years ago, let alone half a century ago. This doesn't mean the film shouldn't be used. Rather it emphasizes the difficulty for any audience, let alone young students, to connect to the destruction of human life on such a large scale.

After an hour, the film seems relentless, as if it will never end. It becomes too much, too many images of the atrocities, too much to digest, too much to comprehend. It attempts to provide respite here and there, like in the incredible animation of Pavel Friedman's poem "I Never Saw Another Butterfly." But the film fails to establish the origin of the poem, where and when it was written, or even Friedman's age at the time it was written.

The film ends with the liberation of the camps and the liberators witnessing the evidence of the Nazi atrocities. It shows the Nazis attempting to conceal their crimes amid an ocean of too much evidence.

Images of the bodies being hurled into massive burial pits play across the screen. A bulldozer is shown pushing hundreds of skeletal bodies into a mass grave. Orderlies carry an emaciated body on a stretcher across the screen. Not until the man blinks is it clear that he is still alive.

Simon Wiesenthal personally describes witnessing the arrival of his liberators. Images of the living skeletons and bodies of the survivors flash across the screen. Hatikvah, "The Hope," accompanies his account of his memories. The use of Hatikvah inserts a subtle Zionist subtext, similar to the use of the song "Jerusalem of Gold" at the end of *Schindler's List* as the surviving Schindlerjuden place stones on Schindler's grace in Jerusalem. Images are shown of Germany surrendering, Americans celebrating in the streets, Churchill addressing the English people, the French celebrating liberation. Uplifting music swells behind the images. The Nuremburg trials of Nazi officers accused of crimes against humanity show the perpetrators denying their guilt, one after the other, "We did not know -- We were following orders -- We were only small cogs, bureaucrats doing our jobs."

A reading implores Jewish audiences to "Honor the Torah we lived by and the psalms we loved. We hope that someone will say the Kaddish for us." The text of the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, appears on the screen as Simon Wiesenthal recites the prayer in memory of all the Jews killed by the Nazis. Only Jews will truly understand this moment. At last, a few photos of some of those lost in the horror appear on screen, fading

out to the image of Simon Wiesenthal standing in Jerusalem at the Wailing Wall. Inserting a prayer between stones of the ancient Temple, Wiesenthal says he has never forgotten those murdered. This last image, without explicitly stating it, suggests that the existence of Israel is a direct result of the atrocities in Europe. By the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Israel and the Holocaust had become the twin pillars of Jewish American civil religion. Sheramy explained how "American Jewish educators attempted to ensure that their students understood the critical importance of Israel. Teaching the history of the Holocaust, many argued was critical to this endeavor. As one teacher explicitly articulated in 1976, 'no one can understand the significance of Israel unless he sees it in the perspective of the Holocaust.'"[140]

Simon Wiesenthal stands at the remnants of the ancient Temple in a country reborn as a sanctuary for all the Jewish people. The imagery connects Jewish responsibility of remembering the victims of the Holocaust with remembering the needs of Israel. This message, similar to the message of *Schindler's List* a decade later, emphasizes the redemption of the martyrs of the Holocaust through the establishment of Israel. Israel will insure that "Never again" will Jews endure another Holocaust.

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[140] Sheramy. p. 82. Quote referenced by Sheramy: Memo, Simon Herman to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, [1976], I Box 10, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, JESNA Papers, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, New York.

Genocide portrays the Jews as a people, the Jewish life created over centuries that was nearly destroyed by hatred and intolerance. Not only does it wish to indoctrinate youth on their responsibilities to remember, to make the world a better place, to carry the torch nearly snuffed out in the extermination of Europe's Jews, but to adults it points a finger of blame, pointing at those complicit in allowing the destruction to occur.

The film focuses on the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust. The entire production paints as bleak a portrait of Jewish victimization as possible. This picture is countered by the vividness of Jewish life and culture that was destroyed. It makes viewers feel as if even today the danger of the violence and hatred is beginning again. When asked about this film, Tracy O'Brien commented that

> *Genocide* is a good film because it covers the whole time period. If you want a concise overview it is about as good as you can get if you have limited time. The film looks at the Holocaust from the perspective of the bystanders and perpetrators, not just that of the victims. Many films simply overemphasize the role of the victims.[141]

Genocide strongly emphasizes the Holocaust as a pivotal moment in world events and the necessity to learn from it. The immense quantity of historical details may overwhelm some classes with too much information to digest. Janet Maslin touched on this in her review of the release of the film: "The capsule history of European Jewish culture goes by much too quickly to have sufficient impact, and few hard facts are

[141] Tracy O'Brien. Phone interview December, 1, 2004.

clearly stated. But when *Genocide* moves on to the Holocaust itself, it becomes as chilling and forceful as its makers wished it to be."[142]

Educational Use and Significance

In 1983 the Simon Wiesenthal Center published *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust,*[143] edited by Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, as a companion volume for the film. Six years later, in 1987, the Center published *A Teacher's Guide to the Film Genocide*[144] created by Dr. Michael Zeldin, then Associate Professor of Jewish Education at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. Dr. Zeldin prepared this curriculum for the Simon Wiesenthal Center with editorial and advisory assistance from Rabbi Daniel Landes, Mr. Aaron Breithbart, and Mr. Mark Weitzman. The study guide provides a point for jumping off from the experiences and events to create discussions and deepen understanding about the significance of what the film presents to its audience.

When questioned, regarding oversight of the creation of the study guide, Dr. Zeldin said: "The Simon Wiesenthal Center gave me free rein in writing the guide. They may have done some editing afterwards; I have actually never seen the final published version. I received very little

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[142] J. Maslin. "Film: 'Genocide,' View of Holocaust" (New York Times). New York, March 14, 1982.
[143] Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes eds. Op. cit.
[144] Dr. Michael Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the Film Genocide.* Op. cit.

feedback from teachers; a few who used it told me they found it 'useful.'"[145]

Grobman and Landes' 1983 companion guide for *Genocide* provides a comprehensive exploration of the events surrounding the Holocaust. The book was

> initially intended to serve as a companion volume to the film, *Genocide*. The book, however, stands on its own as a study of the critical issues of the Holocaust, many of which are raised in the film itself. It consists of specially commissioned articles, appearing for the first time, that survey the whole range of Holocaust scholarship. The essays are written by experts in the fields of European, American, and Jewish history, psychology, religion, and theology. While viewing the Holocaust as a unique event, we have attempted to show the context of Western and Jewish history.[146]

Each chapter of the *Guide* provides insight into specific aspects of the Holocaust through individual essays. The *Guide* closely follows the form of the film utilizing texts and accounts from the film at the beginning of each chapter as well as following the chronological/historical order of the film. The chapters are "Approaching the Holocaust," "The Jews of Europe," "Anti-Semitism," "Overview 1933-1945," "The Process of Destruction," "The Ghettos and the Partisans," "The Camps," "The Bystanders," "Aftermath," "Implications," and "Postscript."

As a publication of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and as an artifact of the late seventies/early eighties, this companion volume emphasizes the predominant message of the era, the historical victimization of the

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[145] Dr. Michael Zeldin. E-mail correspondence December 5, 2004.
[146] Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds. p. viii.

Jews. Following the film, the early chapters establish the historical presence of the Jews in Europe and describe the historical origins of Anti-Semitism towards the Jews. The essays, detailed and concise, paint a clear, vivid picture that establishes the Jews as the victims of Christian and Gentile animosity throughout history. The publication then provides an overview of the time period followed by detailed essays concerning the means used to kill the Jews. It provides poignant descriptions of the ghettos and of those Jews who chose to become partisans and fight against their Nazi persecutors. The final chapters focus on the environments of the camp, the different facets of the bystanders, and the aftermath of the war.

The companion *Guide* provides a detailed overview of the historical factors that made the destruction of the European Jewry possible and the process by which it took place. While some essays provide insight into those who chose to resist, the essays predominantly focus on themes such as the Jews as victims, the role of the perpetrators, the role of the bystanders, and the overall cost in the aftermath of the war. In support of the film, and in concert with the study guide, the three resources provide a detailed and powerful course of study to gain insight and some understanding of the Holocaust.

Dr. Zeldin set about to create an educational tool employing a "methodology familiar to every professional teacher and to prepare material that encourages critical thinking which can serve as a starting

point for more advanced discussion."[147] The *Guide* utilizes the film as a central educational tool while offering an outline of the sociological, historical, and political significance of the Holocaust era. It emphasizes that the film does not stand alone but must be used within a larger context, combining teaching and discussion with viewing. It emphasizes to teachers the importance of Holocaust education, and it admonishes them to convey to students a sense of the importance of the subject within history and within their lives. The *Guide's* primary emphasis is to place the film within a teaching context.

The study guide offers a framework of a four-stage program that then focuses on six goals/points of understanding that a teacher might use to further a student's understanding of the Holocaust. The four stages are

1. Introduction and preparing students to view the film
2. Actual screening of film
3. Debriefing immediately following the screening
4. A follow-up designed to address the specific goal or goals the teacher has identified.[148]

By utilizing a methodology familiar to all professional teachers, Dr. Zeldin creates a guide that easily teaches what many deem a difficult subject. The framework recommends, prior to the film, providing students with background information and preparing them for the powerful visual elements they will see in the film. The framework recommends time for debriefing a class immediately following the film.

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[147] Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the film Genocide.* Op. cit. p. i.
[148] Zeldin. p. 2

While the majority of Holocaust educators understand the need for debriefing immediately after showing a Holocaust film, time constraints often impinge on this stage. Often post-viewing debriefings end up neglected or truncated based on these time constraints. This may cause traumatic stress among students not allowed sufficient debriefing time or push some students away from the topic completely.

In their article "Expressing the Inexpressible through Film," John Michalczyk and Steve Cohen believe one of the central issues involved in using film to teach about the Holocaust to be "understanding how to express the horrors of the time without disturbing the psychological development of the student."[149] They believe it is important for a teacher to gauge whether a film is appropriate to the emotional and cognitive level of their students. The article addresses the difficulty of time restrictions within a classroom setting: "In a 45 minute class period it is not possible to introduce a feature film, screen it, and discuss it, and it is even a struggle to do this over two periods."[150] Today, many instructors use short films such as *Josef Schultz* and *Ambulance,* or film segments from longer films to trigger discussions. This approach allows them to use cinematic images as entrance pieces into discussions while allowing for time to cover the necessary material. Dr. Zeldin's study guide depends on instructors using the film *Genocide* as the core of their

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[149] S. Cohen and J. Michalczyk. "Expressing the Inexpressible through Film" (*Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*). S. Totten and S. Feinberg, eds. Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2001, p. 203.
[150] Ibid. p. 204

Holocaust unit. The study guide also depends on an instructor dedicating a large block of time to the unit in order to discuss the multiple aspects of the film. However, the study guide is flexible enough that an instructor could choose individual focus points based on their time restrictions. Genocide presents an excellent example of a film that can easily be used in a stop and go manner. Because the film and the study guide follow a basic historical outline, they allow the instructor the flexibility to break up the viewing of the film and the lessons. Viewing the film as a whole and covering the entire contents of the study guide would be the ideal goal. However, to facilitate comprehension and assimilation of the information, the film may easily be broken up over several class periods. Smaller viewing segments followed by discussions allow for a gradual intake of the films historical details and major themes. It also may prevent an audience from being overwhelmed by the large quantity of powerful and emotional images and testimonies. Based on the factual density of the film, Dr. Zeldin uses the study guide to recommend educators specify focus points to their students prior to viewing the film in order to avoid confusion and information saturation.

After the debriefing in which students are encouraged to express their reactions, the fourth stage of the framework focuses on the primary goal(s) of the unit. The primary list of goals specifies six focus points teachers may use or choose from to further the understanding of the film and the significance of the events of the Holocaust. The guide

recommends that one to two hours should be devoted to each of the follow-up activities incorporating several different learning experiences suggested for each goal.[151]

The guide lists and describes in detail its six goals of understanding and the significance of each goal:

1. Students should understand the importance of remembering the Holocaust and should commit themselves to learning about it.
2. Students should realize that Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust was vibrant and varied.
3. Students should understand the political and social forces that led to the Nazi rise to power. They should know that Hitler was able to amass power because of the acquiescence of the masses.
4. Students should know how the Nazis progressively dehumanized their victims as they proceeded with their increasingly violent programs to kill Jews and others.
5. Students should know that while world leaders and their governments reacted to the Holocaust with silence and inaction, some individuals did work to help save Jews from death.
6. Students should realize that it is impossible for us to know what it was like to be in the place of one of the victims of the Nazis. They should know, nevertheless, that individuals and groups acted to maintain their human dignity.[152]

Each goal consists of six subsections of process: Key concepts of each goal, Reading suggestions, Preparation, Follow-up, Understanding, and Personalization. The goals incorporate texts from the film, historical facts, and poetry to create learning scenarios that provide a greater

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[151] Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the film Genocide.* Op. cit. p. 4.
[152] Ibid. p. 5-6.

understanding of the period and events that allowed for the atrocities of the Holocaust. The goals also reinforce students' knowledge about key vocabulary and their definitions in reference to the Holocaust to strengthen their ability to think and speak in the terminology of the lessons. The study guide provides an entire unit on the Holocaust developed around the film. This study guide fully incorporates the goals of its time defining the Holocaust as a central subject crucial to the development of Jewish identity. It embodies goals of its era as outlined by Rona Sheramy in her study of the evolution of Holocaust education as a means of defining one's Jewish identity. She states that educators of this time "stress the Holocaust, alongside the founding of Israel, as a pivotal event in twentieth-century Jewish History that merits significant attention in American Jewish education; and they view narratives of Jewish wartime victimization as well as Jewish heroism as conducive to promoting a positive identity in American Jewish youth."[153]

The *Guide* states the overall goal for understanding:

> [O]nce students have reviewed the pertinent content, they can proceed to develop a deeper understanding of what they have learned. The understanding activities call on students to draw generalizations, analyze what they have learned, and seek insight into specific historical events and the actions of those who participated in them. The purpose of these learning experiences is to help students make order of the vast amount of material presented, and to deepen their understanding of the Holocaust and the themes which it evokes.[154]

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[153] Sheramy. p. 57.
[154] Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the film Genocide.* Op. cit. p. 5

The intent behind the study guide is admirable and well stated, but perhaps overly ambitious. It relies on expert Holocaust educators who continually reinforce and review what the students have learned and the significance of learning it.

In the late 1990s, Temple Adath Israel of Lexington, Kentucky, not having a full Holocaust curriculum in place, utilized the film *Genocide* without the study guide or a detailed introduction to the Holocaust for its 9th grade students. As one of the instructors present for the showing of the film, I was surprised how little introduction or post-film discussion took place. Recently adopting new educational goals, Temple Adath Israel has instituted an entire unit dedicated to Holocaust education. Rachel Belin has been teaching Holocaust education at Temple Adath Israel for the last two years. When asked about Holocaust education prior to 2003 and the manner in which *Genocide* was shown in the late 1990s, Mrs. Belin explained that the viewing of the film probably constituted the only religious school exposure the students had to the Holocaust. In the last two years, however, Temple Adath Israel has instituted a full Holocaust unit.[155]

For a class to gain a full understanding of the time and events portrayed in *Genocide*, it is recommended that the companion and study guides be used in conjunction with the film. A class' lack of time to dedicate to the subject will strongly influence an educator's decision to

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[155] Rachel Belin. Phone interview November 19, 2004.

use *Genocide* or choose shorter trigger films when incorporating a film into their lesson plan. For this very reason, Dr. Michael Zeldin strongly recommends that students should be asked to focus their attention on specific aspects of the film so that they will be able to concentrate on those salient moments of the film that will help them in the discussions and activities included in the guide.[156]

A film's length as much as its content influences the manner in which it may be used for educational purposes. These factors also influence whether reference librarians recommend the films. Exceedingly long films may cause teachers to choose between showing a film in one sitting without time for discussion, choosing to show individual scenes, or breaking it up over several sittings and running the risk of diluting the impact of the film as a whole. *Genocide* avoids this problem in that it can easily be used in a stop-and-go manner. As a medium length, historically accurate documentary, *Genocide* succeeds in painting a broad picture of the time period while providing very personal accounts from the writings and testimonies of firsthand experiences. However, the graphic content of some of the visual images and testimonials may limit the use of the film to the higher grade levels. This decision should be based on the maturity of the class and whether the instructor feels the benefit of the film outweighs the psychological and emotional impact the film may have on a class.

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[156] Zeldin. *A Teacher's Guide to the film Genocide.* Op. cit. p. 2.

Conclusion

Today *Genocide* stands as one documentary film among a plethora of documentaries, fictions, historical biographies, and biographic fictions dealing with aspects of the Holocaust. It stands as a significant historical artifact not just for being the first award-winning documentary dealing with the subject, but for the creative and powerful manner in which it depicted the time and events in the film. The film includes detailed historical facts combined with powerful, artistically rendered personal accounts of victim and survivor experiences to create a connection between audiences and the past. The production of *Genocide* opened yet another door in the world's consciousness of the events surrounding the Holocaust, advancing the previous efforts of films such as *Night and Fog* and *Holocaust.* It surpasses these films by striving for historical accuracy and presenting the historical facts and events dramatically without trivializing them.

The companion volume and study guide created to accompany the film offer powerful educational tools to assist in furthering Holocaust education and awareness. The combined use of all three resources allows for a comprehensive unit on the history and ramifications of the Holocaust. While the film and educational resources may not be used frequently by educators today, all three remain potent educational tools

that helped pave the way for many of the other films, and educational materials that followed.

CHAPTER 4
SCHINDLER'S LIST: BRINGING THE HOLOCAUST INTO POPULAR CULTURE (1990s)

Introduction

Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, inspired by Thomas Keneally's book of the same name, chronicles the story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved more than 1,100 Jews from deportation during the Holocaust. Released in 1993, Spielberg shot the film in a severe black-and-white that lends a historic, period appearance to it. The film tells of Schindler's decisions to maintain his Jewish workforce at all costs, creating a list of "his" Jews to be saved from a fate of certain death. The tale of this "righteous Gentile" earned seven Academy Awards, including the award for Best Picture. The vivid and stark imagery of the film makes it difficult to watch, yet compelling in its attempt to show an example of goodness within the hell of the Holocaust.

Spielberg saw an opportunity with the success of Schindler's List to promote greater Holocaust awareness and education throughout the nation. The film's success provided the financial resources needed to create educational and historical materials including over 50,000 video oral histories of survivors. Of course, Spielberg's effort to further Holocaust education does not mean that his film represents a good teaching tool. This chapter will focus on the historical significance of the

film, the educational use of the film and provide a detailed analysis of both the film, the educational guide created by Facing History and Ourselves, and some curricula that utilize the film to teach about the Holocaust. I argue that while *Schindler's List* may not be an ideal film to use in an educational setting, its historic impact on Holocaust education is certainly its lasting legacy.

Historical Events Influential to Holocaust Education and Awareness

Ever since the televising of the Eichmann trial in 1961 and the 1978 television broadcast of *Holocaust*, many Americans have sought to gain a greater understanding of and ability to discuss the atrocities of the Holocaust. The thematic focus of Jewish education shifted from the 1950s through the 1980s, influenced by historical events of the 1960s and 1970s. Rona Sheramy states that the "The presentation of Jewish victimization during the Second World War in relation to the travails and triumphs of Israel also provided a critical framework for discussion of the Holocaust in the 1960s and '70s." She describes two phases in the representation of the Holocaust that occur between the early 1960s and early 1970s especially after the Six-Day War and prior to the Yom Kippur War. In the first phase, Jewish life in Israel is shown as redeeming Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. With the second phase, following the Yom Kippur War in 1973 through the late 1970s, educators began to emphasize Jewish victimization during the Holocaust as critical to

comprehending the need to support and defend Jewish interests, especially regarding Israel.[157] While the Eichmann Trial brought Holocaust awareness to a new level, the Six-Day War and especially the Yom Kippur War emphasized the vulnerability of Israel. "Thereafter, the Holocaust became central not only in Jewish life, through museums, memorials, courses, cultural events, annual commemorations, and bulging libraries of books, it also became part of general American memory."[158]

In the 1940s and 1950s the term "Holocaust" had yet to be coined in reference to the destruction of European Jewry. After the war most survivors remained silent, still traumatized by their experiences. At this time the destruction of European Jewry had yet to become an issue of sustained discussion or media concern.[159] From the 1950s through the 1980s Holocaust education shifted from an adjunct piece included within European history and World War II studies to a primary course of study in and of itself. According to Jonathan Sarna, "the Holocaust-Israel Motif reoriented late twentieth-century American Judaism."[160] Sarna sees Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) and Yom Ha-Atsma-ut (Israeli Independence Day) as thematically linked. "The rebirth of Israel from the

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[157] Rona Sheramy. *Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education.* Ann Arbor, UMI Dissertation Services, 2001 p. 75.
[158] Jonathan D. Sarna. *American Judaism.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004 p. 334.
[159] Alan Mintz. *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America.* Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2001, p. 3.
[160] Ibid. p. 338.

ashes of the *Shoah* is a symbol of hope against despair, of redemption against devastation."[161]

Peter Novick sees the shift slightly differently. He attributes this shift to "supply responding to demand." Novick describes Jewish organizations of the 1970s trying to figure out how to "shore up Jewish identity, particularly among the assimilating and intermarrying younger generation."[162] While many young Jews eschewed religious services, Jewish institutions, and studying Hebrew or learning about Jewish culture,

> the Holocaust looked like the one item in stock with consumer appeal. Jewish college students who had shown no interest in other academic courses with Jewish subject matter oversubscribed offerings on the Holocaust. Public events related to the Holocaust drew audiences far exceeding those on other subjects, and were scheduled with increasing frequency.[163]

Novick explains that the most important factor to the Jewish organizations was that the Holocaust programs "showed a capacity to pull in Jews with an otherwise marginal Jewish identity."[164] Sheramy concurs with this, seeing the "Holocaust as central to an actualized Jewish identity and as promoting Jewish survival" and believing that this reflects an extensive "perception in American Jewish education in the

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[161] Ibid. Sarna quotes Peter S. Knobel, ed. *Gates of the Season: A Guide to the Jewish Year.* New York, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983 pp. 6 and 102.
[162] Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life.* p. 186.
[163] Ibid. pp. 187-188.
[164] Ibid. p. 188.

late 1970s, '80s, and '90s."[165] Novick is accurate in that the greatest movement of the shift occurred in the 1970s. However, the events of the 1960s acted as the catalyst that furthered the evolution of Holocaust education towards what it has become today.

Historical Impact and Analysis of *Schindler's List*

The 1993 release of *Schindler's List* provided a new catalyst for Holocaust and tolerance education as the film "generated an extensive public discussion on the nature of the Holocaust and its mediation—in print, on radio, television, and e-mail bulletin boards, at symposia, and in classrooms, among other venues—the likes of which hasn't been seen in the United States since the premier broadcast of NBC's *Holocaust* miniseries in April 1978."[166] *Schindler's List* stands as the most well-known "popular culture" Holocaust vehicle of the 1990s.

When *Schindler's List* premiered on network television, in February of 1997, it was accompanied by the significant announcement that it would be bracketed by sponsor commercials so that the film could be viewed without commercial interruption. This represented "an incisive comment on the growing sacred nature of the Holocaust in American

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[165] Ibid. p. 95.
[166] J. Shandler. "Schindler's Discourse: America Discusses the Holocaust and Its Mediation, from NBC's Miniseries to Spielberg's Film" in Yosefa Loshitzky ed. *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997 p. 153.

culture."[167] In comparison with the commercially interrupted showing of the miniseries *Holocaust* and later commercial vehicles dealing with similar content, this commercial-free showing emphasized some of the changes within the broadcast world regarding the perception of the Holocaust and the respect shown towards the film/topic.

This sacralization of the Holocaust contrasts with the apparent "aura of silence"[168] that existed immediately following the Allied victory and at the beginning of the Cold War.

Herbert Steinhouse, a Canadian journalist working for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Europe, wrote the first article about Oskar Schindler in 1949. In 1948, Steinhouse met Itzhak Stern in Paris, France, where Stern, his brother, and their wives were waiting for the American Joint Distribution Committee to assist them in obtaining immigration papers. From his relationship with Stern, Steinhouse met and began to talk with some of the *Schindlerjuden* or "Schindler Jews." He began to piece together their stories. He talked to both Stern and Oskar Schindler himself, but because everyone wanted to forget the atrocities, no one would publish the article. Steinhouse put the article away. Forty-five years later, in 1994,[169] he finally published it,

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[167] Hilene Flanzbaum, ed. *The Americanization of the Holocaust.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 p. 7.
[168] Robert Abzug. *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.
[169] Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation. Inc. *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List.* FHAO, Brookline,

well after the 1982 publication of Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's List.*[170] Thomas Fensch, editor of *Oskar Schindler and His List*, believes the importance of this article is that "Steinhouse's early research validates all the rest of the previously publicized Schindler material."[171]

The release of *Schindler's List* had a significant impact on the American culture of the 1990s and the renewed interest in learning about the history surrounding the Holocaust. Prior to the film's release, national polls showed a decrease in knowledge of the Holocaust among Americans. This was attributed largely aging and death of the survivors, the last living link to the tragedy. *Schindler's List* presented a means to counter the dwindling interest and decline in knowledge concerning the Holocaust.[172]

Spielberg's dedication to his project helped bring about a great deal of its visibility. Similar to NBC's public relations campaign for *Holocaust*, Spielberg devoted funds and time for the development of a large amount of educational programming to coincide with the release and screenings of his film. Rather than merely *being* educationally significant, Spielberg *created* educational significance for his film by providing special

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Massachusetts, 1994 p. 46. Also available online at http://www.facinghistory.com.
see also Thomas Fensch. *Oskar Schindler and His List*, Vermont, Paul S. Eriksson Forest Dale, 1995. The book also includes Steinhouse's original article. p. 3-4.

[170] Thomas Keneally's book was first published in Great Britain in 1982 as *Schindler's Ark*. It received the most prestigious literary award in Great Britain, the Booker Prize, and sold nearly one million copies. See Fensch Op. cit. p. 41.

[171] Fensch. Op. cit. p. 19

[172] Mintz. p. 131.

screenings for students and providing educational materials for teachers. He also founded his own non-profit organization to support Holocaust education.

The year 1993 saw both the first screening of *Schindler's List* as well as the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

> This two-decade process of memorialisation culminated in 1993 being dubbed 'the year of the Holocaust.' With the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and first screening of *Schindler's List*, it seemed that the 'Holocaust' had become as American as apple pie. The Holocaust was now both on the Mall in Washington, DC, just a few hundred feet away from the Washington Monument, as well as being filmed by Hollywood's most successful producer.[173]

Such an impact has left a resounding impression both on the cinematic community and on Holocaust education today. It is revealing that it takes a world-renowned action film director, rather than educators, to emphasize the need for greater Holocaust and tolerance education in our school systems and within our society. Steven Spielberg utilized his film as a call for greater Holocaust education and awareness throughout both the United States and the world. Spielberg used his profits from the film to establish several foundations. During the theatrical run, Spielberg provided free screenings for any interested instructors/classes. Upon the release of the video, he donated copies to every school in the country accompanied by the Facing History and Ourselves study guide. These actions underlined the importance Spielberg placed upon the educational

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[173] Tim Cole. *Selling the Holocaust.* New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 13-14.

value of learning about the Holocaust, the lives it destroyed, and the few who did something about it.

A Culmination of Holocaust Films

Despite its wide acclaim and acceptance as a great film, *Schindler's List* still has some tremendous flaws that need to be analyzed and understood. *Schindler's List* is one of the most stylized Holocaust films of the past decade. Spielberg used his abilities as a director to focus the gaze and emotions of his audience throughout the film. Normally this is expected of a director, but within a Holocaust film, this can pose great problems if the director does not take care with the message being emphasized.

Some scholars fear the public perceptions or rather misperceptions of *Schindler's List.* Tim Cole comments that for some viewers, *Schindler's List* almost achieves the status of a primary source. "It is not seen as simply a representation, but as the 'real thing'." Spielberg's decision to shoot on location using hand-held shots and black and white film gives large parts of the film "the feel of being an authentic newsreel film of the ghettoisation and deportation of Polish Jews. As a result, the film 'particularly because of its style' is—it has been suggested—in danger of 'displacing the evidence and documentation on which it is based' and therefore 'acting in people's minds as a metatext of historical

evidence.'"[174] This should cause great concern if people begin to accept a cinematic interpretation of history as historically accurate fact. Educators should fear that films, as cinematic interpretations of history, might take primacy over the use of primary texts and historical accounts in the teaching and understanding of historical events and figures. All films present a directorial point of view. Historical features and documentaries stand the risk of being taken at face value. While most audiences understand a film to represent a director's perspective on a certain time and events, they may not be able to differentiate between all of the facts and fictions. While educators give students the opportunity to think about the experience of viewing a film, they may not be able to correct all of the misperceptions a film might generate.

Schindler's List distinguishes itself as an artifact of the '90s, as a significant part of a time when Holocaust awareness reached new levels in popular culture. Spielberg's choices gave the world a powerful film to be both appreciated and feared. It should be appreciated for any good that may come from it, be it renewed vigilance, new awareness or knowledge; and it should be feared for its power and its ability to be mistaken for a primary source.

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[174] Ibid., p. 75. Cole's end citation comes from H. Bresheeth. "The Great Taboo Broken: Reflections on the Israeli Reception of *Schindler's List*" in Loshitzky ed. Op. cit. p. 206.

Reinforcement of Jewish Stereotypes in *Schindler's List*

The film represents a cinematic culmination of Holocaust themes that reinforce Jewish stereotypes, presenting Jews as weak and victims while seemingly cleansing the roles of Christian bystanders through the deeds of one man. Judith Doneson raises the question of whose history Spielberg records since much of the Jewish content in Keneally's book never made it on film. The film does not show any visual indicators of Jewish presence in Kraków, such as the image of a synagogue or a Jewish institution. The only image shown indicating the historical presence of Jews is the road of broken gravestones in Plaszów. "Spielberg has shown us the Holocaust largely from a German perspective. Throughout the action, the Jews are seen primarily as compliant victims of this history."[175] Whereas *Holocaust* portrayed Jews as both victims and as resistance fighters, *Schindler's List,* to preserve its portrayal of the Jews as weak and victims, offers no depiction of the Jewish fighting organization, the ZOB that instigated numerous acts of sabotage outside the ghetto.[176] The film shows the victimization of the Jews, a theme emphasized, beginning in the 1970s, by Jewish educators.

Doneson's argues that *Schindler's List* "perpetuates the image of a weak, feminized Jew, the passive figure . . . at the expense of truth." In portraying the Jews as feminized, passive, weak victims, the film

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[175] J. Doneson. "The Image Lingers: The Feminization of the Jew in Schindler's List" in Loshitzky ed. Op. cit. p. 143.
[176] Thomas Keneally. *Schindler's List.* New York, Touchstone, 1993 p. 131.

establishes their need for a "Savior," someone strong, active, male, and non-Jewish. This doesn't take away from the historical fact of Oskar Schindler saving "his" Jews. It does, however, eliminate the ability of the film to portray any strong, active, male Jewish characters. One of the strongest characterizations of the film is the Jewish, educated, female engineer overseeing the construction of a building in the camp. She has the strength of conviction to argue what she knows to be right, regarding the construction, with her superior and even with S.S. Commandant first name Goeth. Goeth has her shot for being a strong, mouthy, educated Jewish woman, but he then instructs his underling to do exactly what she recommended to prevent the building from collapsing. The film shows exactly what happened to tough, opinionated Jewish characters. The film does not, however, show any Jewish characters of strength outside of the camp taking independent action to control their fate.

Spielberg also reinforces the sexual stereotypes of the "Jewish woman" in his portrayal of Helen, Goeth's personal maidservant. In the film Helen does nothing to attract the attention of Goeth, whose moods include randomly shooting Jewish inmates from his bedroom balcony while his German lover lies naked in bed. Spielberg portrays Goeth's inability to suppress his desires for Helen as a stereotypical portrayal of the unnerving sexuality of the Jewish woman. "For Goeth, Helen embodies the Jewish temptress—seductive, dark, forbidden—in this case by law. This is surely a perverse vision in that Helen is consumed by

fear, not desire to seduce—even for survival. That of course makes her all the more intriguing to Goeth—she is both temptress and slave."[177] Goeth's desires for Helen finally get the best of him in a moment that almost makes him appear to care for Helen as a person. We watch Goeth pace while complimenting Helen. Wearing only a near-translucent nightgown and still wet from a sponge bath, she stands in fear of him. In this instant, Doneson believes, "their relationship fits the model of the weak, feminine Jew being protected by the strong, male Christian."[178] Goeth even offers Helen a recommendation for after the war, acknowledging a nearing future. He claims, "I would like to reach out and touch you in your loneliness." Almost convincing himself, he says, "It isn't us [all the hatred] it is this [the war]."[179] Only when Goeth touches Helen's hair, slowly working his way down her body, moving in to kiss her, does he catch his illicit desires getting the better of him. When Helen's "powers" as a seductress threaten to break his spirit, Goeth steps back, retreats into his hatred. He begins beating her severely about the face; throwing her onto her bed, he pulls a shelving unit down upon her. Throughout the entire scene, Helen says nothing, does nothing. Silent, fearful, she stares intently into a corner straining not to provoke him. Even through the beating, not a word or whimper in protest passes Helen's lips.

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[177] Doneson. p. 147.
[178] Ibid.
[179] *Schindler's List.* Scene 22, Time 01:52:00.

Spielberg utilizes this scene in juxtaposition to the earlier scene where Schindler introduces himself to Helen. Schindler asks if Helen knows who he is, attempts to give to her black market chocolate and explains Goeth's treatment of her. Schindler's gentleness with Helen juxtaposed with Goeth's brutality "informs us that the myth of Schindler as savior has invaded his own perceptions. He has become the embodiment of a holy shrine: Touch him and you are saved."[180] The scene criticizes Schindler's narcissistic tendencies as he buys into his self-image of a deliverer of salvation. Schindler ends the scene explaining to Helen that Goeth "won't shoot you because he enjoys you too much. He won't let you wear the star because he doesn't want anyone to know you are a Jew." As Schindler bends to kiss a weeping Helen and sees her flinch, he reassures her it is "not that kind of kiss" (compared to all the kissing he does later at his birthday party) but rather the protective kiss of a parent/guardian.

Despite both men's ability to sate their carnal needs with German women, Spielberg juxtaposes Goeth's desires for Helen with the depiction of Schindler seeking a beautiful Jewish receptionist. The film depicts Schindler ignoring the more homely, capable women while fawning over the more attractive, less skilled women. In one scene, Schindler even has his front doorman turn down a woman's request for a meeting when, as a shadowy figure from the top of a staircase, he determines she isn't well

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[180] Doneson. pp. 147-148.

dressed or attractive. The next scene shows the same woman, her hair done up, as she carefully applies lipstick in a mirror. We then see her standing at the bottom of the same staircase, jacket off, beautifully dressed, and positioning her body appropriately for the appraisal she expects this time. Only after the woman borrows fancier clothes and gives herself a complete cosmetic makeover does Schindler find her attractive enough to grant an audience. Schindler escorts her into his office where he seats her in the chair before his desk upon which he sits, giving him the dominant position over the woman. Once the woman explains her understanding of Schindler's factory as a haven, "a place where no one dies," we see Schindler's face freeze in fear and disappointment. He sees the woman's request as a potentially dangerous trap. The woman shows a willingness to offer herself to the "carnal" Schindler for the sake of gaining the favor of Schindler the "Savior." Schindler, in fear of the woman, leaves his dominant position on the corner of his desk and walks to the opposite end of the room where he stares out the window, distancing himself from her. The scene even implies that the woman is prepared to sleep with Schindler as she stands, presenting herself, her case, pleading, "Look, I don't have any money. I borrowed these clothes. I'm begging you, please, please bring them here."[181] Her body language implies that she will barter the only

[181] *Schindler's List.* United States, 1993. Director, Steven Spielberg; script, Stephen Zaillian. California, Universal Pictures DVD 2004 Scene 19, Time 01:31:56.

thing she has left if he will only insure her parents' transfer to his factory. Schindler, expressing anger and fear, yells at the woman that she will not entrap him, the rumors she has heard being lies, the things she implying punishable by death. The woman flees in fear. Schindler then later insures a bribe reaches the corrupt Jewish security police officer, Marcel Goldberg, to have her parents transferred from Plaszów to his factory, which furthers both his portrayal as a savior figure and as a very human figure full of major character flaws.

While Jewish characters in the film exemplify a number of Jewish stereotypes, predominantly that of the passive Jew, seductive Jewish woman, and the shrewd business man, Jewish strength and resistance is absent from the film. This omission differs from the historical references to Jewish resistance Keneally included in his novel. Nancy Thomas Brown comments that without the references to "resistance within the ghetto, the Jews remained the perfect victims—weak, ineffectual, and incapable of helping themselves. If someone strong, fearless, virile, and Christian—an Oskar Schindler—did not act on their behalf, they were doomed."[182] Schindler represents both a German and a Christian who risked his life to save Jewish lives. The predominantly weak portrayal of the Jewish characters contrasted with the strength of Schindler emphasizes the Jews' need for a Christian savior. Brown believes the film

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[182] N. T. Brown. "From Weimar to Hollywood: Christian Images and the Portrayal of the Jew" (*Film and History*). Cleveland, Oklahoma, vol. 32.2, 2002 p. 21.

shows "a Jew presented through the prism of Christian stereotypes of Jews" and depicts the tragedy of the Jews as "resolved in Christian terms."[183] Brown concludes that

> Hollywood's universal approach to the Holocaust . . . consciously avoids indicating that the Holocaust, rooted in Christian anti-Semitism, grew out of the heart of western civilization, was initiated by the Allied Germans, and was carried out while the entire Christian and Western world stood by, unable and unwilling to stop the process of destruction.[184]

These themes, stereotypes, and characterizations in *Schindler's List* pose many problems from an analytical point of view. It is important, whenever utilizing this film, to examine not only the historical, cultural and educational significance of this film, but also the reasons why this film is a difficult educational tool to use and possible solutions to these difficulties.

The Survival Rate of Schindler's List—Goeth vs. Schindler

Spielberg attempts throughout the film to endear the film's characters to its audience in his depiction of the characters' experiences that lead either to their deaths or to the safety of Schindler's factory. Tim Cole comments that

> While in the 1959 movie Diary of Anne Frank only Otto Frank survives and in the 1978 television mini-series Holocaust only one son of the family's children survive, in Schindler's List 'virtually every character in whom the audience has emotionally invested lives!' This is a

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid. p. 22.

> 'Holocaust' where the people who matter to us as an audience live, rather than die." As one journalist has noted, Spielberg has made 'a movie about World War II in which all the Jews live. The selection is "life", the Nazi turns out to be a good guy, and human nature is revealed to be sunny and bright.' Thus Spielberg has made a movie which amounts to a 'total reversal' because he has given us a 'Holocaust' film which leave us with a sense if 'triumph'.[185]

In effect, however, Spielberg presents almost every character, except Schindler and Goeth, as two-dimensional representations. Both Schindler and Goeth are shown throughout the film as men discovering their individual powers and abilities as the war swirls around them. The portrayal of Goeth as the personification of cruelty and mediocrity rings historically accurate, showing how he drinks and womanizes his way through the war while killing prisoners/workers indiscriminately from his balcony. Even Schindler's imposed suggestion that an emperor proves his power through forgiveness cannot alter Goeth's depravity as his charitable feelings cease when he shoots his house-boy for a minor infraction.

Schindler is presented as a historical enigma who allowed few to know him as a real person. According to Martin Levy, "Schindler was such an enigmatic figure in life. It is not surprising that other information or alleged information could continue to surface in death."[186] Schindler, a heavy drinker and womanizer, while affected after seeing the

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[185] Cole. p. 78. Cites J. Hoberman. "Schindler's List. Myth, Movie and Memory" (*Village Voice*). New York, March 29, 1994 p. 31.
[186] D. Smith. "A Scholar's Book Adds Layers of Complexity to the Schindler Legend" (New York Times). New York, November 24, 2004.

clearing of the ghetto in 1943, is not shown realizing the true implications of his actions until the very end of the film. From the point where Schindler purchases the munitions factory in Brennec, Czechoslovakia, swearing no successful munitions will leave his factory, and saves the women from Auschwitz, Spielberg begins to reveal the transformed Oskar Schindler as savior. Spielberg shows Schindler in church swearing off other women to his wife. This scene, juxtaposed with the earlier scene of Schindler attending mass to place a black market order for bribery gift-baskets, attempts to show the lengths to which Schindler has transformed his attitudes, desires, and goals. After running his factory non-stop for the entire film, in the end, Schindler chastises a rabbi for working after sundown on Friday rather than preparing for the Sabbath. Spielberg shows all of this to show Schindler's realigned priorities. Viewers are meant to believe Schindler now sees his slave laborers as people rather than property. He acknowledges one of his workers as a rabbi who should be preparing for the Sabbath, though for years he has ignored whether his workers abstained from work on any day, let alone the Sabbath.

Throughout the film, Spielberg juxtaposes Goeth and Schindler, the bad German versus the good German. While attempting to give a historic sense of the men behind the characters, the film portrays them as diametric opposites. One represents a sadistic Nazi officer while the

other represents what passed for good during World War II. Ilan Avisar believes that

> Spielberg refrained from any references to anti-Semitism as a driving force for the Holocaust or to Germany as the state apparatus that organized the destruction. The treatment of the perpetrators displayed "political sensitivity," pitting a malicious German (Goeth) against a good German (Schindler). This balance naturally diminished the crucial role of the Germans in the Final Solution and may explain the favorable reviews of the film in Germany.[187]

The film attempts to balance the movie and to "clean up" the story to make it understandable to a casual American audience. This decision doesn't diminish the film's impact in generating greater Holocaust awareness and the need for improved Holocaust education.

The film is a cinematic interpretation of Thomas Keneally's fictionalized biography. Holocaust historian David Crowe points to a number of fictionalized moments in the film: "To begin with, there was no Schindler's List. 'Schindler had almost nothing to do with the list.' said David M. Crowe, a Holocaust historian and professor at Elon University. . . Schindler was in jail for bribing Amon Goeth . . . and the manager, Itzhak Stern was not even working for Schindler then."[188] Mr. Crowe indicates that nine lists had actually been drawn up, "the first four by

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[187] I. Avisar. "Holocaust Movies and the Politics of Collective Memory" (*Thinking about the Holocaust: After Half a Century.* Alvin Rosenfeld, ed.). Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997 p. 53 as referenced by Nancy Thomas Brown in "From Weimar to Hollywood: Christian Images and the Portrayal of the Jew," (*Film and History*). Cleveland, Oklahoma, vol. 32.2, 2002 p. 20.
[188] D. Smith. Op. cit. David M. Crowe. *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities and the True Story Behind the List.* Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2004.

Marcel Goldberg, a corrupt Jewish security police officer. Schindler suggested a few names, but did not know most of the people on the lists." Mr. Crowe goes as far as to describe *Schindler's List* as "theatre, but not in a historically accurate way."[189]

While the film might, in the opinion of Avisar, diminish the "crucial role" of the Germans in the Final Solution, it still depicts some of the historical Nazi atrocities in graphic detail and tells a compelling story of one German Christian who eventually chose to do the right thing. Spielberg doesn't shy away from the atrocities, but he does Americanize the Holocaust story in an attempt to depict a message of hope along with the history of death and destruction wrought by the Nazis against the Jews.

Just prior to Schindler abandoning his newly freed people at the factory, Spielberg shows the sacrifice Schindler's workers go through, removing their gold crowned teeth in order to present him with a gold ring inscribed with the Hebrew words from the Talmud— "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." This scene evokes a reminder of the earlier scene of a pile of gold crowned teeth (having been removed from the dead and the living) being spilled upon a warehouse table by the Nazi soldiers of Goeth's camp. Only in this moment of the presentation of the ring does Schindler truly understand how much more he could have done. In his final speech, near tears, Schindler for the first time equates

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[189] Ibid.

his material goods to the human lives they could have saved. "I could have got more. If I had made more money, I threw away so much money. I didn't do enough. This car, why did I keep the car? Ten people are dead. This pin, two people, this is gold, at least one more for it, and I didn't."[190]

Christian Imagery in *Schindler's List*

Scholars have a very difficult time with the Christian imagery in *Schindler's List.* The film depicts the strong Christian/Gentile attempting to rescue the weak, passive Jews. Schindler's interaction with Helen in Goeth's cellar and the conclusion of the film also generate the image of Schindler as a Christian "Savior." In regards to many Holocaust films, Ilan Avisar believes strongly that

> The imposition of Christian values and symbolism on the historical material leads to the distortion of the Jewish identity of the victims, almost to the point of denying their reality or innocence, suggesting that their Jewishness is some sort of an inherent flaw whose salvation lay in a benevolent Christian relationship or in Christianity itself.[191]

Schindler's List, rife with Christian symbolism and values, poses many difficulties in its cinematic interpretation of the Holocaust and the historical characters it represents on film. Spielberg shows Schindler, flaws and all, but the savior imagery juxtaposed with the depiction of

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[190] Steven Spielberg, director. *Schindler's List,* Universal City, California, Universal Pictures 2004 DVD Side B 01:00:09.
[191] I. Avisar. "Christian Ideology and Jewish Genocide in American Holocaust Movies" (*Holocaust Studies Annual,* 3) Florida, Penkeville Publishing Co. 1985 p. 41.

Goeth's evil nature is rife throughout the film. Schindler in fact historically saved "his" Jews. However, it would be difficult to believe that his Christianity had more to do with his actions than his eventual understanding of the human necessity of his actions. Some educators may choose to ignore the Christian symbolism and values represented in the film either due to personal beliefs, the make-up of their students, ignorance, or from the basis that the symbolism seems unimportant in Holocaust education. Others may not deal with the characterization of the historical characters or the representation of the Jews throughout the film because of some of the same reasons. Utilizing a film of such depth, complexity, and length poses innumerable difficulties for educators choosing to incorporate this film into their Holocaust curricula.

Educational Use and Significance

> If *Schindler's List* had reached out to shake up its audience through atrocity and sensationalism, it would have taught nothing and left little impact, in addition to not having won the enormous viewership it did. [Instead,] the universal effectuality is tested not only in its impact on mass audiences but also, and perhaps more demandingly, in its ability to move even further those who feel they have been saturated with the subject and have already been moved as much as they would like to be.[192]

The educational impact of *Schindler's List* has been incredibly significant. Steven Spielberg himself spearheaded the educational

[192] Mintz. p. 130.

initiative surrounding *Schindler's List*, making free screenings available in theatres to any educators including this film in their curriculum. In an interview in 1994, Spielberg explained his push for the use of his film as an educational tool: "There won't be any relevance if kids today aren't taught that connection to their past and taught that tolerance breaks that repetition of events."[193]

The movie gained widespread approval and received a great deal of acclaim for its educational appeal and success in getting Americans thinking and learning about a historically important period. Still, the film presents challenges to educators. On the most basic level, given the length of class periods in most schools, the three-hour running time creates obvious teaching challenges. Rabbi Elisa Koppel talked about the difficulty in deciding to offer a showing of *Schindler's List* to her high school students when she was the Dean of Jewish Life at the American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, North Carolina in 2003-2004. The belief in the importance of showing this film in particular and the need for time to discuss the film afterwards weighed heavily in her decision and planning. Rabbi Koppel noted the

> ...scheduling needs, and the difficulty in having anything required for the students outside the classroom. At what point do we make something required vs. optional? The film is difficult to watch and not everyone is prepared for the experience of the movie. We ultimately decided to show it. We had some whole school programs for Yom HaShoah, a memorial service and things of that nature.

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[193] National Education Association. *NEA Today*, Maryland, November 1994, p. 7.

> We then decided to make the viewing of *Schindler's List* optional. About a dozen students stayed to watch it out of 100 students total, 75 of who were boarding students. Half way through the film we broke for dinner due to its length. At dinner we talked a little about the movie and afterwards we held an informal discussion where we talked for a little. A lot of their history program is Holocaust education. These are kids who know more and get more understanding out of the discussion and education points. Having had Holocaust education prior to viewing the film they had an understanding of what they would be viewing.[194]

Rabbi Koppel felt *Schindler's List* was an effective educational tool both in day schools and religious schools. She also showed it to her confirmation class at Community Synagogue in Port Washington, New York, in 2003. "It was that showing of the movie that made me realize that most high school students haven't seen *Schindler's List*. A lot of teens today haven't seen it at all. I felt it was important for them to see it in that it is a good tool to provide some emotional understanding of the Holocaust."[195] Rabbi Koppel, like many rabbis, used *Schindler's List* in both a formal and informal educational setting. Understanding her student's knowledge base, Rabbi Koppel felt comfortable in both settings, using the film as a visual vehicle to expand her student's understanding of some of the people and events relating to the Holocaust.

Rabbi Sanford Kopnick[196] of Valley Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio, took his confirmation students to see the film in the theatre as informal education. Immediately afterwards, he sat them down outside the theatre

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[194] Rabbi Elisa Koppel. Phone interview January 10, 2005.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Rabbi Sanford Kopnick. Interviewed on October 23, 2003.

on the floor of the mall to discuss their reactions to the film. Similarly, Rabbi Stan Miles[197] of Temple Shalom in Louisville, Kentucky organized a voluntary trip with congregants to see the film, followed by a dinner and discussion at the temple. Unknown to anyone else, one of his congregants was a survivor of Auschwitz and talked about her experience with the group. Rabbi Miles described it as "a moment of rare kiddushah," hearing about one person's experience, a person many had known for years without knowing this aspect of her life. Both rabbis utilized the film successfully in an informal setting. Both utilized a method of exposure to the film followed by informal discussions of people's reactions to the film. Informal settings allow for participants to choose the time and space necessary to view the film with a post-viewing discussion. These instances present less difficulty than the decision to view the film in a classroom setting without making some arrangements for time or breaking up the film over several weeks.

Sheri Vinnecour, as part of her studies at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, created a curriculum guide for teaching the Holocaust to "seniors in high school continuing their Jewish education in a religious school setting"[198] as a means to further their understanding of the Holocaust and the perpetrators. Vinnecour chose this age group because she felt that "although they may have already encountered Holocaust

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[197] Rabbi Stan Miles. Phone interview February 9, 2004.
[198] Sheri Vinnecour. "History of the Holocaust: A Curriculum Guide." Los Angeles, California, Tartak Learning Center Collection, Spring 2000 p. 3.

studies in their earlier educational career, by senior year they have developed a more mature cognitive style and ability to probe deeper into the facts."[199] The curriculum offers an extensive look at critical aspects of the Holocaust. Vinnecour also recommends several films to support her curriculum, including *Schindler's List*. The curriculum, overall, provides thorough recommendations for suggested learning experiences in each unit. Understanding the vast areas of interest in studying the Holocaust as a whole, the curriculum uses multiple methodologies allowing educators to shape their lessons to meet their educational goals.

Her curriculum's fourth unit, "Resistance and Rescue," includes the viewing of *Schindler's List,* followed by a discussion of Oskar Schindler and his actions as a rescuer of Jews. The curriculum gives no further recommendations for the direction class discussions should take other than dealing with Schindler's role as a "rescuer of Jews."[200] This decision perhaps limits the learning experience by exploring a small facet of the entire film. While the curriculum provides brief synopses of other recommended films in other units, such as *Ambulance* and *A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto*, it fails to provide a synopsis of *Schindler's List*, assuming that educators will have previously viewed the film or know about its content. Furthermore, while the recommendations for the other films provide details of possible discussions, none of the multiple discussion points are offered for the post-viewing discussion of *Schindler's List*. The

[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid. p. 24.

curriculum also makes no suggestions for accommodating the length of the film to avoid viewing it over multiple class periods. Since Schindler doesn't personally choose to become a rescuer of Jews until very late in the film, the assignment seems too narrowly focused. Vinnecour seems to take for granted that recommending the viewing of *Schindler's List* speaks for itself.

Facing History and Ourselves and Steven Spielberg

Today, Facing History and Ourselves provides one of the most comprehensive study guides using *Schindler's List* as its central educational tool. Facing History and Ourselves is an organization dedicated to educating youth about world history and how to stop the cycle of hatred, violence, and intolerance that still exists in our world. The organization developed its primary curriculum in the late 1970s for secondary schools. It encourages students to "identify the role and responsibilities of the individual within a given society in times of choice" and to develop a "sense of community and the impulse to be more socially active in times that demand personal courage and risk-taking."[201] Jan Darsa, current Director of Jewish Education at the organization, adds, "We are about citizenship education."[202]

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[201] Margot Stern Strom and William S. Parsons. *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior.* Watertown, Massachusetts, International Educators, 1982 p. 13.
[202] Jan Darsa. Facing History and Ourselves-Boston. Phone interview November 23, 2004.

Spielberg worked with Facing History and Ourselves to create a study guide specifically meant to accompany the film when used as an educational tool. Spielberg came to Facing History and Ourselves, to create the study guide for the film, after some screenings went poorly. Tracy O'Brien, a resource libraries manager for the last thirteen years at Facing History, explained:

> We started working with him to make a guide to make it more accessible. We told him you can't just go to a school and show the film. Screenings went badly at one showing where kids were laughing. They had never learned anything [about the Holocaust prior to viewing the film], and were told they were going on a field trip. They thought it was fake. They laughed at some of the graphic scenes. Some survivors who were there to speak to them afterwards were offended. It was a disaster of a situation. Spielberg learned that you need preparation for an audience not familiar with it. They need education.[203]

After the film's release on video, Spielberg donated copies to every school. "Every secondary school got a copy of the guide with a copy of the film when the video was released in 1995. So every secondary school [in America] should have a copy of the film and the guide from Facing History and Ourselves."[204]

The Study Guide

Focusing on the historical events preceding the Holocaust and the results of policies of genocide, Facing History and Ourselves hopes to relate history to the lives of students today and how they view their own

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[203] Ibid.
[204] Tracy O'Brien. Phone interview December 1, 2004.

identity. The extensive study guide for *Schindler's List* is available both as a free download from the Facing History and Ourselves website and as an educational packet from any of its local offices. The study guide builds a foundation to help educators use the film "for reflection on and discussion of issues important to adolescents and their roles as citizens in a democracy."[205]

In the study guide, Spielberg himself explains some of his hopes for the educational uses of his film:

> Even today the world has not yet learned the lesson of those terrible years. There are far too many places where hate, intolerance, and genocide still exist. Thus *Schindler's List* is no less a "Jewish story" or a "German story" than it is a human story. And its subject matter applies to every generation. *Schindler's List* is simply about racial hatred—which is the state of mind that attacks not what makes us people but what makes us different from each other. It is my hope that *Schindler's List* will awaken and sustain an awareness of such evil and inspire this generation and future generations to seek an end to racial hatred. Facing History and Ourselves developed this study guide to inform that journey by helping students make essential connections between the past and the present.[206]

The study guide utilizes one of Facing History and Ourselves' standard educational formats as seen in some of their other educational publications like *Facing History and Ourselves: The Jews of Poland*[207]

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[205] Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation. Inc. *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List.* Brookline, Massachusetts, FHAO National Foundation Inc., 1994 p. 7.
[206] Ibid. p. 4.
[207] Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation. Inc. Facing History and Ourselves: The Jews of Poland. Brookline, FHAO National Foundation Inc., 1998.

and *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior.*[208] This study guide is broken up into three sections: Pre-view, Focus on *Schindler's List*, and Post-view. "Pre-view" prepares students for viewing the film by looking at human behavior, developing a common vocabulary for discussing identity, group membership, and racial and ethnic hatred.[209] Students then utilize these ideas to focus on the events leading up to World War II in Germany, Poland, and the United States.

"Focus on *Schindler's List*" is designed to be used before and after the viewing of the film. This section incorporates a chronicle of key events in Schindler's life, a brief history of Thomas Keneally's book and Herbert Steinhouse's article on Schindler, and an extensive examination of the film as an interpretation of historical events.

Finally, Post-view provides more historical perspectives to discussions generated by the film. This section helps students confront the images they have viewed and gives them a safe environment to discuss their reactions to those images. Overall the guide is meant to be flexible, allowing teachers to mold it to the time allotted for their unit on the Holocaust.

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[208] Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation. Inc. *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior.* Brookline, FHAO National Foundation Inc., 1994.
[209] *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List.* Op. cit. p. 8.

This study guide incorporates many tools to help students understand their experience of the lessons and the implications of the ideas they learn. With the use of the guide

> Facing History seeks to foster cognitive growth and historical understanding through content and methodology that continually complicates students' simple answers to complex questions. The film and the readings also stimulate students to think about the complexities of good and evil, the choices they have as individuals within a society, the consequences of those decisions, and their responsibilities to self and others.[210]

The guide incorporates different pedagogical exercises, such as recommending that students keep a journal of their experiences and develop a personal identity chart to begin to understand the similarities and differences among themselves. It also recommends that students create a portfolio of their work, so that upon completion of the three units, students can select key portions of their journal and assignments to be included in the portfolio as a means of showing how they have grown and changed throughout the learning process. At the end of each lesson/reading is a section titled "Connections." Each of these sections provides possible discussion questions to encourage students to articulate their thoughts on the readings either verbally or as journal entries.

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[210] Ibid. p. 7.

Pre-View Section

The "Pre-View" section is broken up into seven sections based on individual set-induction readings to generate discussion of the individual topics. While this section gives a brief historical synopsis of the *Schindler's List* and its background, the section does not go into any historical background concerning the events depicted in the film. Instead the section deals with topics such as "Identity and Conformity," "Stereotypes and Choices," "Conformity," "Obedience, and Choice," "From "Race" to Racism," "*Us* and *Them,*" "Racism—A Distorted Lens," and the meaning of "Building a 'Racial State.'" All sections help shape students' ideas about themselves as well as about the society and world they live in.[211] This section incorporates the exercise of having students create an identity chart to map all the elements that identify who they are at school, at home, and in society and the essential identifying characteristics with which they identify themselves.

> The readings focus in particular on those that relate to our identity, our need to belong, and the ways we see ourselves and others. The last three readings in this section link those ideas to life in the United States, Poland, and Germany in the years before World War II. In doing so, they will provide you with the historical perspectives you will need to understand ideas developed in the film.[212]

The texts of this section encourage students to look at group mentality, the search for acceptance, stereotypes, choices, and conformity in

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[211] Ibid. p. 9.
[212] Ibid. p. 13.

society. Through the reading and analysis of these texts and a close look at the implications of the Milgram Experiment, this section attempts to assist students in defining race, racism, and obedience.[213]

Focus on *Schindler's List* Section

The section "Focus on *Schindler's List*" seeks to widen perspectives and foster critical viewing by encouraging reflection and discussion. The units of this section include "A Chronicle of Key Events in *Schindler's List*," "Viewing the Film," "Responding to the Film," and "A Journalist's View of Oskar Schindler."[214] Beginning with the discussion of race and class inequalities found within societies, this section then discusses life experiences as a Jew in Europe and the Nazi building of a "Racial State."[215] By providing a historical background for the film, this section hopes to prepare students prior to viewing the film as well as facilitate discussions and journal entries after viewing the film. The Chronicle of Key Events[216] provides a detailed chronological list of the significant events and historical facts shown in the film to underscore their importance. This section continues to encourage students to keep a journal of their thoughts and impressions of the film, recording

> What you remember about the film. What images or scenes stand out? Which characters stand out in your mind? What qualities make those characters memorable?

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[213] Ibid. p. 21.
[214] Ibid. p. 10.
[215] Ibid. p. 34.
[216] Ibid. p. 39.

> List what you learned from the film; questions that the film raised but did not answer; and at least one way that the film relates to the world today.[217]

The journaling allows students to record their immediate thoughts, giving them time to order their thoughts, and record questions they may want to explore during open discussions with their peers.

A problem with this section is that it neither goes into extensive detail concerning World War II nor provides a chronicle of key events on the Nazi persecution of European Jewry. It provides key concepts of building a "Racial State" while focusing narrowly on the moral implications of racism, obedience, and group identity versus individual identity in terms of the atrocities visualized in *Schindler's List* without providing a larger contextual background of the events outside of the film. Therefore, the guide and the film should be used as part of a greater Holocaust curriculum possibly Facing History's more extensive *Holocaust and Human Behavior* curriculum.

Post-View Section

The "Post-View" section attempts to add new voices and historical perspectives to the class discussions, as well as some of the moral and ethical questions brought up by the film. The units included in this section cover: "Questions of Power," "Separating Neighbor from Neighbor," "Betraying the Youth," "Obedience and Choice," "Choices in a

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[217] Ibid. p. 42.

Time of Narrowing Choices," "Slavery and Labor," "Was Oskar Schindler a Hero?" and "Can One Person Make a Difference?"[218] This section expands on the images viewed in the film, the characters and how they are portrayed, and how the film portrays historical events. It seeks to teach students how to analyze critically a film based on lighting, mise-en-scene, use of imagery, and symbols and how they can influence significant scenes in a film. The individual sections dissect elements of the film in order to understand the mindset of the perpetrators, the victims, and the significance of Oskar Schindler's actions and the repercussions he might have faced had he failed or been caught. A great difficulty of this section is that one might spend a lifetime analyzing the film and never gain a better understanding of the motivations behind a personality like Commandant Goeth, or even Schindler himself. Furthermore, in using film to better understand history, students may arrive at the false perception of the film as history rather than an interpretation of history, one that may or may not be accurate.

Thoughts on the Study Guide

This study guide provides a comprehensive learning plan in order to facilitate the growth and understanding of students through studying the Holocaust, viewing *Schindler's List* and discussing powerful texts that deal with differences, identity, otherness, and how we each choose to live

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[218] Ibid. p. 10.

within a society. However, *A Guide to the Film Schindler's List* isn't meant to be a comprehensive Holocaust curriculum.

Curricula such as *Holocaust and Human Behavior* or *The Jews of Poland* offer semester or year-long courses of study that include facets of the *Schindler's List* guide while expanding into greater depth and detail the study of human interaction and the personal factors that allowed an event like the Holocaust to occur. But even these textbooks do not provide a full detailed understanding of the historical events surrounding the Holocaust. Facing History and Ourselves, as a civics-minded organization, seeks to create understanding, acceptance, and tolerance in the students it teaches. The organization creates a very universalistic portrait of the Holocaust in order to reach both Jewish and non-Jewish students. The ultimate goal of its lessons is the understanding of the ideas that divide society as compared to ideas that promote tolerance, acceptance, and understanding of each person's individual significance. This universalistic message fits within the context of the universality of the Holocaust as portrayed in *Schindler's List.*

Alvin Rosenfeld "wonders how any story of the crimes of the Nazi era can remain faithful to the specific features of those events and at the same time address contemporary American social and political agendas."[219] The tendency to universalize the nature of the Holocaust can be contributed in part to the Americanization of the Holocaust. This

[219] A. Rosenfeld. "Americanization of the Holocaust" (Commentary) June 1995 p. 35.

poses great problems in the portrayal and understanding of the Holocaust.

Henry Friedlander addressed many of the problems that face Holocaust education as far back as 1979:

> The problem with too much being taught by too many without focus is that this poses the danger of destroying the subject matter [the Holocaust] through dilettantism. It is not enough for well meaning teachers to feel a commitment to teach about genocide; they also must know the subject . . .
>
> The problems of popularization and proliferation should make us careful about how we introduce the Holocaust into the curriculum; it does not mean we should stop teaching it. But we must try to define the subject of the Holocaust. Even if we do not agree about the content of the subject, we must agree on its goals and on its limitations.[220]

These problems exist at an even greater level today with some states mandating Holocaust education and the continuing centrality of Holocaust as an educational vehicle used in the construction of Jewish identity. The success of Facing History and Ourselves results in the universal nature of the Holocaust being transmitted to a much broader audience of Jews and non-Jews than any other curricula used today. This may pose a problem if critics begin asking, alongside the anti-Semites, why the Jewish aspect of the Holocaust is so important. It also suggests that different audiences demand different messages.

From the perspective of only Jewish educational settings, Sheramy comments how the entire movement of the Holocaust "from the periphery

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[220] H. Friedlander. "Toward a Methodology of Teaching about the Holocaust" (*Teachers College Record*). New York, 89(3) 1979, pp. 520, 522.

to the mainstream of the Jewish school curriculum reflected the growing view among educators that Holocaust consciousness promoted Jewish affiliation and commitment."[221] But on a greater educational scale outside Jewish organizations and religious schools, this is not the goal of Holocaust education. Nonetheless, how does one educate about the Holocaust without emphasizing the implicit Jewish context of the Nazi's attempt to wipe out an entire people specifically because of their race and religion? How does a universal agenda lessen societal differences without seeming to place perpetrators, bystanders and victims on the same level with greatly differing social agendas?

Educational goals are not about whose genocide is more significant. They are not about ignoring the historical massacres of other nationalities because of the political clout Jews have in focusing attention on the significance of the Holocaust. They are about the genocidal focus, of what represented the epitome in modern European statehood, against the Jews, and the Nazi/German willingness to create technology towards this focus at the expense of their military campaign. The goals are about educating people on the long-term affects of anti-Semitism throughout history that allowed the Nazis to convince the German population to carry out some of the greatest atrocities ever committed by humans against other humans.

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[221] Sheramy. pp. 13-14.

Many historical subjects taught in the United States have a particularistic element to them. The history of the African American and the impact of slavery on African culture, on American culture, and on the self-esteem of the contemporary African American contain a particularistic element as it pertains to Africans, African Americans, and non-African Americans. However, the history also contains a universalistic element of man's inhumanity to man and the corrosive impact of slavery on American society in general. Many historical subjects provide both particularistic and universalistic elements in order to teach about the past and to present a vision of a society where all of humanity might work together to create a better world.

In the end, *Facing History and Ourselves: A Guide to the Film Schindler's List* provides a good foundation for learning about the film and the historical aspects of the film. As a learning tool meant to be used within a larger curriculum, the guide does not provide a detailed description of events leading up to the war and occurring throughout Europe outside of Oskar Schindler's world. The study guide compartmentalizes the historical significance of the film and the film's content to create better understanding of the ideas and beliefs behind the hatred of the Nazis and the significance of Oskar Schindler's actions. These benefits provide a good basis from which students may begin to study and learn about the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Professor Steven Allen Carr teaches film and media studies in the Communications Department at Purdue University in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. When asked about his use of Holocaust films as educational tools, he described using films like *Shoah*, *Genocide*, or *Schindler's List*, as "almost like the experience, or as surrogates of experiencing the Holocaust, as opposed to arguing about cinematic language that gets used when showing the Holocaust in films such as *The Passenger*."[222] Professor Carr favors and uses films that encourage reflection and analysis of ethical issues.

Aside from length, the stereotypes, cinematic elements, historical inaccuracies, and the Christian themes, *Schindler's List* provides many elements an instructor must consider when choosing the film as an educational tool. When planning to use of the film, an instructor must choose elements worth discussing and those to be ignored. *Schindler's List* contains many powerful images. The film's powerful images and success reemphasized the need for greater Holocaust education throughout the world as a means to remind us we are all accountable for each other. Spielberg's establishment of organizations determined to witness and make available the personal stories of thousands of survivors will hopefully allow generations to learn from the mistakes of the past. If anything, this is the true legacy of his film and its profits.

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[222] Professor Steven Carr. Phone interview February 9, 2004.

When using this successful Hollywood film, it is important to emphasize that while most of *Schindler's List* provides an accurate depiction of events and people, the film is historical fiction. Some of the characters are composites of a few different people and some of the scenes and dialogue are fiction. The film may best be understood as an image of one tremendous act of goodness perpetuated by a very human man, vices and all. With the release of *Schindler's List* on DVD, teachers can finally find teaching moments much easier and create a lesson plan including both the viewing of the entire film and highlighting discussions with the pertinent scenes. It is much easier to choose excerpts as well as pinpoint scenes for analysis using the more sophisticated DVD technology.

Schindler's List distinguished itself as a film of its time. Its universal message fits it into the ongoing dialogue between Holocaust educators who argue about the focus on the Jewish context of the Holocaust and those who believe in educating the world to the universal elements of the Holocaust. The film's acclaim and criticism echo that of the miniseries *Holocaust*. Both films inspired Holocaust education to continue its evolution and further discussion of the issues surrounding the Holocaust. While *Holocaust* provides a dramatic story within which historical events are depicted, *Schindler's List* dramatically portrays the life of the historical figure Oskar Schindler and the Jewish people he helped save.

Unlike *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List*, *Genocide* gives a detailed account of the historical facts of Jewish heritage in Europe and the events leading up to the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis. It incorporates survivors' accounts of their experiences and the acts they saw perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews. *Schindler's List* tells the story of one man who made a difference in the lives of over 1100 Jews. It is a Hollywood version of the Holocaust in which Spielberg uses creative license to depict the historical events that brought the lives of those Jews into the sphere of Oskar Schindler. *Schindler's List* will always remain a powerful film, but films will always prove to be difficult tools as representations of history. Many of the problematic elements of *Schindler's List* preclude it from being recommended as a quality tool for Holocaust education. Only an educator can decide whether the benefits outweigh its problems.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Film remains one of the most visceral and poignant educational tools used in educating Americans and American Jews about the Holocaust. This study analyzed *Night and Fog*, *Holocaust*, *Genocide*, and *Schindler's List* as historically and educationally significant Holocaust films. In addition, it analyzed the study guides and companion materials produced to accompany these films as educational tools. Also considered was the time period in which these films were produced. Studying how the films and guides reflect the eras in which they were produced revealed that the media and educational materials incorporated the central themes educators and historians focused on during those time periods.

Night and Fog generated controversy both for what it included and omitted. The French government sought to edit images damaging to the perception of the French of their role as liberators, rather than as collaborators during the war. The German government protested the film's portrayal of Germany, attempting to keep the film from being shown at the Cannes Film festival. Some historians protest the films universal message and the manner in which it omits any reference to the Jewish context of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the film remains one of the most graphically powerful documentary representations of the Holocaust. It allows both the archival and modern imagery to speak louder than the

dialogue, which forced audiences to consider the levels of evil humanity achieved. As stated above, the strength of the images and Resnais' intentions speak out through time to emphasize the importance of memory and vigilance. Studying this film makes it apparent how much educators should know about a film before incorporating one into a Holocaust curriculum, and how powerful images often stay with a student long after a class has ended.

Almost two decades later, *Holocaust* generated as much controversy and criticism but for vastly different reasons. At the time, many critics complained about the manner in which the film trivialized its subject matter. Scholars and survivors did not approve of the dramatic framework surrounding the representation of the historical events or the sanitized manner in which the miniseries portrayed the atrocities. Rather than embracing the amount of Holocaust awareness generated by this one media event, critics chose to focus on the apparent flaws of the miniseries, tearing apart the small picture without appreciating the larger impact the film had on Holocaust awareness and education. *Holocaust* must be understood as a watershed event that catapulted the plight of the Jews during World War II into the consciousness of the nation if not the world. As representations of historical events, the depicted atrocities lost none of their power. More accuracy and realism might have assuaged some survivors and critics, while running the risk of being unmarketable and losing its audience.

Almost in response to the critics' complaints about *Holocaust*, the producers of *Genocide* sought, only a few years later, to create a film so accurate that critics and scholars could not find any historical flaws or statistical inaccuracies in any part of the film. The filmmakers set out to create a concise, historically accurate portrait of Jewish life prior to World War II and the manner in which the destruction of European Jewry was perpetrated with the silent consent of most of the modern world. However, the downside is that the film contains an overabundance of historical details. This makes it difficult to digest everything the film depicts in a single sitting. While the film may not be used as frequently by educators today, the film and its accompanying educational resources remain powerful educational tools that helped pave the way for many of the other films, documentaries and educational materials that followed it.

Schindler's List represents a culmination in the depiction of the Holocaust in American film. The film emphasizes the universal message of the Holocaust. It provides Jewish audiences with a highly acclaimed cinematic representation of some of the atrocities committed during World War II. It also provides non-Jewish and German audiences with a Christian German figure as an access point to learning about the Holocaust. The film and educational materials continued the evolutionary process of Holocaust awareness and education throughout the nation. Despite some of the film's flaws, such as its stereotypical

depiction of Jews, it refueled the national interest in the Holocaust and furthered the implementation of Holocaust education throughout the nation's school systems.

Each film differs greatly from the others. As documentaries, *Night and Fog* and *Genocide* use archival footage as a powerful means to depict the atrocities humans visited upon each other. *Night and Fog* focuses on the universal nature of the Holocaust to the point that it only mentions a Jew once in the original script, omitting the translation of the word in the English subtitles. *Genocide* focuses almost entirely on the Jewish context of the Nazi attempt to destroy all of European Jewry. While it mentions other victims of the Nazi regime—Gypsies, Communists, and other political opponents—it concentrates almost entirely on the nature of anti-Semitism and the Jewish world and culture that existed prior to the Nazism. Both films utilize graphic images. However, where the dialogue in *Night and Fog*'s dialogue is read in a level monotone and contains some historical inaccuracies, *Genocide* is completely and historical accurate and uses the vocal talents of Orson Welles and Elizabeth Taylor to add an emotional tone to the historical and testimonial dialogue.

On the other hand, *Schindler's List* and *Holocaust* represent the best efforts of their producers and their time periods in presenting dramatizations of the Holocaust. *Holocaust* premiered during a period of renewed focus on ethnic differences throughout America in the 1970s. This focus, inspired by the success of *Roots* and the Black Power

movement, made this production possible, bringing Holocaust awareness and the Jewish context of the atrocities to the forefront of American thought. *Schindler's List*, produced by one of the most powerful directors in Hollywood, reemphasized the universal message of the Holocaust in the same year that saw the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. Together these films mark crucial moments in the evolution of Holocaust awareness in the United States. Both films inspired educators and organizations to utilize these media events to further Holocaust education and awareness throughout America. Both films, while flawed, proved successful in their ultimate goal of emphasizing the importance of learning about the Holocaust in order to move toward a more tolerant and understanding society.

As a researcher I learned that few congregations have archived their Holocaust curricula up until the 1990s. Facing History and Ourselves maintains records on all requests for films and the number of uses of each film in a given year. The Simon Wiesenthal Center has sales records of *Genocide*, but no long term information concerning the number of religious or secular schools who own a copy of the film, have used it, or continue to use it for Holocaust education. Many educators and Rabbis spoke of the films they've used to teach about the Holocaust. Few, if any congregations have written Holocaust curricula prior to 1990.

As a Jewish educator I was amazed at the long-term distress caused by the images of a film like *Night and Fog*. Over two decades after

viewing the film, some educators and rabbis still remembered how well or poorly they were taught about the Holocaust and their response to viewing *Night and Fog*. This emphasized the extreme care needed, when using Holocaust films as educational tools, because a student's emotional response to the images cannot readily be gauged.

I believe that Holocaust education is an important aspect in shaping Jewish identity. Understanding the Holocaust helps shape a person's knowledge of Jewish history and why the Jewish people continue to defend their place in the world. I believe it is the responsibility of all Holocaust educators, if using films, to understand how to use them and choose them with great care. Without care and understanding, the images depicted in Holocaust films may cause great emotional distress that pushes students away from the topic.

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