

**THIS PRESENTATION IS BASED ON POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH  
DONE AT University of Canberra**

**TITLE: 'Projecting Consent' – American Pre-War Propaganda Films of WW2**

It explores the responses of American cinema to Nazi-ism in the 'peacetime' interval of 1939-1941 before the United States entered the European war. Because no official state of war existed between America and Germany during this period, the paper's primary concern is the extent to which any propaganda elements in American films needed to be disguised in order to evade censorship.

I argue that in the face of a matrix of domestic censorship regimes, Hollywood's prewar response to Nazi-ism showed a diverse range of mostly overt propaganda. In thus breaking the censorship rules, we see an anomaly that possibly can be explained as a tacit collusion between industry and government.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s the American film industry was at the height of its influence and reach - it was the 'Golden Age of Hollywood'. The period was also a time of global political crisis caused by Hitler's military conquests in Europe.

The issue of whether Hollywood responded sufficiently strongly to Nazism has strongly divided both academic and specialist opinion.

**Are there contemporary parallels?**

The American populace at the beginning of the 1940s was deeply divided over the question of overseas war involvement. Because these were pre-television days, the cinema had a monopoly over the moving image, including 'news', which was then presented in newsreels. Much of the national debate over war involvement was therefore played out on the screen at the local Odeon.

Learning more about how the **actual films** could have influenced audiences in

the 1940s towards war, as this paper intends to do, may increase our knowledge about opinion formation today.

- METHODOLOGY – Textual Analysis
- PRIMARY SOURCES – Films Themselves
- TERMINOLOGY - ‘Prewar’ is used here from the American perspective of 1939-1941, as this is the target audience in question.

### **WHAT WERE THE CENSORSHIP PROBLEMS?**

- Since 1907
- 1934 – strengthened Production Code, through office of Production Code Administration was introduced - ‘Hays Code’ – chief censor - Joe Breen

The Code’s Section ‘Ten’, covering ‘National Feelings’, said QUOTE “the history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly”. Theoretically this meant that since Hitler had become German Chancellor in 1933 any criticism of Nazi-ism could be censored.

Another country which could find offence in pro-war messages was the United States itself. In the **inter-war** years of 1918-1941 many Americans saw their country’s intervention in the First World War as a breach of an American founding principle dating back to George Washington: isolationism. In his farewell speech the first President warned his countrymen against forming “permanent alliances” since “European interests are very remote” from those of the new nation.

George Washington's warnings resonated with many Americans in the post-WWI period as they coincided with the growing disillusion in the country of their break with tradition to intervene in World War 1.

America's most prominent isolationist organisation was called 'America First'. When it was joined by Charles Lindbergh in 1941 America First was able to deploy a media star whose popular standing was at least as high as the matinee idols who could be mobilised by Hollywood. But Lindbergh's public pronouncements were much less circumscribed than Hollywood's. They eventually spilled over into explicit racism and xenophobia in a notorious speech at Des Moines Iowa on September 11, 1941 in which Lindbergh attacked Jewish interests.

Whilst anti-Semitism was undeniably highly evident amongst isolationists, the movement also accommodated some sophisticated political positions. America First's executive chairman, John Flynn, was a journalist who said that though he was no film expert he was "an expert of propaganda"<sup>1</sup>. Flynn's central argument was his insistent linking of alleged unbalanced content in motion pictures to the industry's structure of oligopoly, which led to what he called a "cultural monopoly". Though careful to denounce Hitler and Nazi-ism, Flynn strongly attacked Hollywood's lack of balance, particularly its absence of pro-isolationist portrayals.

**Along with isolationism, yet another barrier to free expression was  
neutrality legislation**

Five neutrality statutes were passed by Congress in the 1930s. With the buffers provided by great oceans to the east and west, American isolationism seemed viable to many, both pro- and anti-war.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Propaganda Hearings, Op.Cit.*, 93.

But in practice, sanction from the law or the government was less intimidating than the popular sentiment reflected in the Congress. In 1937 opinion polls showed 69% supported strict U.S. neutrality. [stayed high through 1941]

Representations of neutrality in films of this period, are few, and varied. In Fritz Lang's 1941 *Man Hunt* the Gestapo chief played by George Sanders describes an agent of appeasement as "a credulous simpleton". Pacifism fared better, with Nazis accusing American protagonists of this stance in *The Man I Married* and *The Mortal Storm*. Most cunning was Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent*, where the American protagonist survives an unprovoked German mid-Atlantic air attack rendered in quite harrowing scenes by Hitchcock in a water tank. The protagonist, played by Joel McCrea, and his colleagues are rescued by an American ship whose captain, articulating official U.S. policy, refuses to allow any news to reach the media. This captain is a "true blue neutral", sneers George Sanders, slyly linking American audiences' empathetic frustration at being censored to officious neutrality.

#### VISION – FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

These restrictions facing filmmakers beg the question of freedom of speech. In this era the Supreme Court's 1915 *Mutual* decision was settled law and said that the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech did not apply to cinema. [In fact First Amendment protection wouldn't extend to cinema until 1952's *Miracle* decision.]

So, in the prewar years Hollywood faced formal barriers to expression on three levels: Hays Code censorship; Neutrality statutes and Constitutional law.

In December 1939, anticipating a future world dominated by totalitarian regimes, Roosevelt said "my problem is to get the American people to think of conceivable consequences without scaring the American people into thinking they are going

to be dragged into this war. Hollywood was about to offer its own solutions to the President's problem.

However in September 1941 anti-war Senators Gerald P. Nye and D. Worth Clark co-sponsored Senate Resolution 152 authorising a Senate Subcommittee to investigate "Propaganda in Motion Pictures" and their capacity to "influence public sentiment in the direction of participation by the United States in the present European war".

The Senate's investigation yielded a transcript that is an extraordinary record of prewar concerns and perceptions. It figures strongly in every history of the phenomenon. As the Senators and witnesses grapple with the films as texts, the entire 449 page transcript takes on the air of crude communications theory.

In the transcript, the films of greatest concern to the Senators are listed and, notwithstanding valuable elaboration by modern scholars, this list of films still forms the foundation of every available work on this topic, whether academic or specialist.

### **We now turn to THE QUESTION: HOW MANY FILMS ARE RELEVANT?**

It is essential to contextualise the films within U.S. cinematic production. The reach of cinema into the U.S. population in this prewar era made the potential influence of the medium immense. In 1939 over one third of the American population had at least one weekly movie attendance and gross participation through repeat attendances was equivalent to **two thirds** of the national population - 80 million people.

RKO head Darryl Zanuck's testimony before the *Propaganda Hearings* said prewar anti-Nazi films "represent only a very small fraction of the Hollywood

picture output". Criticism by Klaus Mann, which argued that Hollywood was doing too little, agreed.

The films of most concern to the Senators coincide ALMOST EXACTLY with the approximately 'a dozen' **"UNEQUIVOCALLY ANTI-NAZI"** [and thus the strongest propaganda] titles identified by film historian Bernard Dick in 1996. This list of a dozen titles from the Major Studios forms a 'canon' [see handout]

To put this in perspective, a gross total of 80 films in the period 1939-1941 are recognised as war-related, and typical annual production was 500 feature films, yielding a proportion of 8% of the total in this period.

The consistency between Dick's survey and the Senators' concerns indicates that these dozen titles comprise the extent of the primarily anti-Nazi American prewar 'propaganda' films of World War II. To use a cricketing analogy, there was no 'Second Eleven'.

## **BUT - WAS THE PROGAPANDA DISGUISED [TO EVADE CENSORS]?**

In the *Propaganda Hearings* Senator Nye <sup>2</sup> saw propaganda being “planted” in movies.

British actor Leslie Howard, on his return home from Hollywood in 1939, prepared a paper for the British Ministry of Information which said that “properly camouflaged, the message we want to deliver can be carried direct to the American people” <sup>3</sup>.

Production records reveal studio decision makers consciously planned to employ a subtext in *Juarez* (1939), so that “every child must recognize that Napoleon... is no one else than Mussolini and Hitler”.

But the proposition that anti-Nazi propaganda in prewar American cinema may have needed ‘encoding’ because of censorship is undermined by a review of prewar reception. In 1940s print media, the existence of numerous unambiguously anti-Nazi American films was not only a given but a phenomenon of some prominence.

In May 1941 *The New York Times* reported that [for movie audiences] “the wickedness of the Nazis is taken for granted and they appear as the menace in all stories.” Nazi demonisation had become so commonplace in peacetime American cinematic representation after war was declared in Europe in 1939 that a scene of Gestapo-inflicted torture could be presented in *World Premiere* (1940) as merely incidental to the plot and unremarked upon in the narrative.

## **VISION – WORLD PREMIERE**

---

<sup>2</sup> *Propaganda Hearings, Op.Cit.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, JR (1983). *Strangers in Paradise – The Hollywood Émigrés, 1933-1950*. London: Faber, 133.

By 1941, said the *New York Times*, “audiences were convinced of the depravity of the Nazis” <sup>4</sup>.

In this paper, testing the ‘canon’ films for covert propaganda is explored further through the 1940 movie, *The Man I Married*.

Like most of the other ‘canon’ prewar propaganda films, the plot of *The Man I Married* can be realistically summarised to appear ostensibly neutral: ‘young American nuclear family travel to Europe and encounter bureaucratic and cultural hurdles’. But while this is not inaccurate it is certainly incomplete. Such a summary elides the considerable discursive anti-Nazi propaganda in the film, including American journalist Kenneth Delane (Lloyd Nolan) saying:

#### VISION – NOLAN’S CAR SPEECH

One of the earliest attempts, in 1939, to codify the elements of propaganda found “seven common devices” <sup>5</sup>, and we can use these to test this film. ‘Name calling’ heads the list of 7 devices, and *The Man I Married* qualifies through its personal belittling of a head of state:

#### VISION – NOLAN’S ‘SCHICKY’ SPEECH

Later in this film, Joan Bennett’s character Carol Hoffman parodies the Heil Hitler salute. This was a recurrent motif in these films – I have a montage here from *Arise My Love*, *The Great Dictator*, *Escape*, & *The Man I Married*)

#### VISION – x4

Postwar research to evaluate these seven propaganda devices for effectiveness towards attitude change focussed on three of them <sup>6</sup>. For the resistant and/or better educated viewer, a “two-sided message” in which the other side’s

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Severin and Tankard, *Op Cit.*, 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.



arguments are briefly mentioned, was proven in 1949 and 1953 research to be more effective<sup>7</sup>.

[A LATER CLIP of *The Man I Married* WILL ILLUSTRATE ITS USE OF THIS]

This is far from an exhaustive accounting of the content of *The Man I Married* but makes it clear that the film was not reliant on masking anti-Nazi messages to gain a release.

Motion picture industry journal *Harrison's Reports* described, on its release, *The Man I Married* as "the strongest indictment against Nazi Germany that has yet been screened – even stronger than *The Mortal Storm*"<sup>8</sup>. Other 'canon' films were similarly assessed by *Harrison's* as being strongly anti-Nazi propaganda: *Escape*"; *The Great Dictator* , *Underground* , *They Dare Not Love* , *Man Hunt* etc.

### **SO - CAN WE Reconcile This Anomaly Of Overt Propaganda In The Face Of Censorship?**

Several explanations present themselves. One is genre.

Family and its domestic setting is a predominant site in the narratives of the 'canon' films. Domestic settings satisfy one of Susan Hayward's<sup>9</sup> key criteria for melodrama. *Halliwell's Film Guide*<sup>10</sup> describes the 'canon' films *Escape*, *The Man I Married*, *The Mortal Storm*, *Four Sons*, *Arise My Love* and *So Ends Our Night* as melodrama.

The melodrama genre appears to have been a 'Trojan Horse' because it ostensibly urged maintenance of the status quo, not upheaval or radical change

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Propaganda Hearings, Op.Cit.*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Hayward, *Op Cit.*, 214.

<sup>10</sup> Halliwell, *Op Cit.*

and thus “helped provide [the studio] with additional cover for the film’s political content”, according to Benjamin Alpers.

### **DID A ‘failure’ of censorship let these films ‘slip through’?**

No state of war existed between America and Germany before Pearl Harbor.

In most Hollywood histories Will Hays and chief censor Breen are typically seen as presenting obstacles to filmmakers. Yet, noting their location inside an industry’s peak representative body, it is this paper’s contention that a more *supple* understanding would see them primarily as *facilitators* for the industry, rather than philistine ‘blockers’ of artistic content.

As Richard Maltby says, Hays’ job was to oversee the “**affirmative** role that the motion picture industry negotiated with the bourgeois institutions of cultural politics”. Such a sensitive task required flexibility and alertness to political developments.

Hays had long promoted ‘entertainment’ as Hollywood’s primary agenda. But by 1941, with Roosevelt safely reelected, Hays’ rhetoric was adjusting to the shifting environment, though his overarching mantra of ‘entertainment’ remained. In Hays’ major July 1941 statement, a discourse of wartime **preparedness** “in the current emergency” emerges:

“Entertainment and recreation might be likened to machine tools necessary to bring human machinery to the height of its efficiency... Pictures play their part in the preparedness of mind and body which results from recreation... picturization (sic) of living events... is a task achieved under freedom, not under the duress of dictatorship, which can create only propaganda”.

Although industry bodies are theoretically independent, “Roosevelt well knew that the modern president commands policy”. The President’s own rhetoric on

intervention had hardened after his 1940 reelection and Hays' statements reflect the government's toughening stance.

More work needs to be done on what appears to be the anomalous non-censorship of prewar anti-Nazi movies. There is a suggestion that, rather than the simple reactionary showman of conventional wisdom, Hays was consistently adjusting his industry's positioning to stay in line with the government's frequently changing signals. The diminishing censorship of these films supports this view, as the industry appeared to cut its censorship cloth to the steadily worsening political winds.

### **WE WILL NOW LOOK AT HOW THE FILMS OPERATED ON AUDIENCES**

A typical U.S. movie program in this era combined cartoons, newsreels, short films and/or a 'B' feature before the 'A' feature <sup>11</sup>. Each of these supporting 'entertainments' often had their own anti-Nazi content, thus widely dispersing the sources of propaganda <sup>12</sup>. Nor were anti-Nazi representations limited to those feature films that were primarily war-oriented, as illustrated by the 1940 romantic comedy *Tom, Dick and Harry*

VISION - *Tom, Dick and Harry*

**Temporal strategies** were a key element in many 'canon' films including *The Man I Married*, *Escape*, *So Ends Our Night* and *The Mortal Storm*.

Hollywood typically crafts its films to be as devoid of temporal specificity as possible. Yet from the opening, establishing shot of the 1940 production, *The Man I Married*, the audience is taken back to... 1938.

---

<sup>11</sup> Gomery, D 'The Popularity of filmgoing in the U.S., 1930-50' in McCabe C (1986) *High Theory/Low Culture* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Koppes and Black, *Op Cit.*, 45; see also Dick, *Op Cit.*, 4.

Umberto Eco has many interesting things to say about time-free narratives in the context of the Superman comic character which apply directly here. In this short space suffice to say that inserting **recent-past** time markers as in these various canon films works to 'ground' the audience in Reality, and prevent the escapism associated with the cinema experience.

### **ANOTHER STRATEGY I WANT TO DESCRIBE IS the Construction of 'firsthand' experience**

"According to Christian Metz, the spectator identifies with... the invisible agency of the film, through... the focus of the camera" <sup>13</sup>.

In *The Man I Married* the spectator is positioned by a succession of operations so that they have apparent 'firsthand' experience of events.

The film's protagonist Carol Hoffman [Joan Bennett] is to travel through Germany as a 'stringer', or casual reporter, for the magazine she works for in New York, *The Smart World* (instantly establishing a binarism which critiques Europe – the 'Old World' – with its lethal, age-old rivalries). This role raises expectations early in the viewer that they will see this world through the eyes of an objective professional. (It also calls to mind Hitchcock's more mischievous gambit of dispatching a 'crime' reporter to Europe in *Foreign Correspondent*.)

Carol's function as a representative of the complacent American populace is established early when she says of concentration camps, "I bet they're not half as bad as they say they are". This is also, since she has a news-gathering role, a critique of U.S. journalism.

---

<sup>13</sup> Smelik, A (1998). *And the Mirror Cracked – Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 39.

VISION – long MARRIED train sequence [note: ‘frame’ of train window]

The film’s audience sees these worker-prisoners through the single large window of the comfortable tourist carriage, a clear metaphor for the viewing position of U.S. audiences. This creates a frame to be ‘experienced’ by the spectator within the ‘invisible’ frame of cinematic discourse. Tacitly challenging the bland assurances of the preceding dialogue, this reflexive moment powerfully posits the spectators’ ‘experiential’ evidence as superior to that available secondhand through media sources in the U.S. and uncritically regurgitated by Americans from the ‘smart world’ like Carol.

Another striking deployment of documentary footage in *The Man I Married* comes in a highly original sequence soon afterward. Dinner is interrupted in the middle class home of Carol’s father-in-law because Goebbels’ evening radio broadcasts must not to be ignored.

VISION – radio/newsreel sequence – MARRIED [alert to how Joan Bennett’s position moves]

[If that clip’s length made you uncomfortable – imagine the 1940 audiences... ]

By starting with the spectators’ imagining of the activities suggested by the radio broadcast and then completing this imagining for them, a controlled co-authoring is effected.

Intertextuality, “the coexistence of ‘several discourses’ in a single (inter) textual space”<sup>14</sup> enabled such linkages to also go outside the film’s narrative to other

---

<sup>14</sup> Staiger J (1992). *Interpreting Films – Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 38.

movie matinee elements. Documentary footage would have been viewed earlier in the same program, but in the 'news' frame of a newsreel.

The material difference in the feature film's framing of documentary footage is its absence of announcer voiceover. As Slavoj Žižek says <sup>15</sup> of Charlie Chaplin's "aversion to sound" which he could resist no longer by the time of *The Great Dictator*, his first 'talkie' and the best known of the prewar anti-Nazi films, "the disruptive power of the voice, of the fact that the voice functions as a foreign body" is tacitly recognised in voiceover's absence. Voice-free, newsreels function to ensure the spectators' engagement with the footage is unmediated and collaborative. In effect, meaning here is co-authored between the filmmaker and the viewer.

---

<sup>15</sup> Žižek S (1992). *Enjoy Your Symptom!* London: Routledge, 2.

**THE FINAL, AND MOST ELABORATE TECHNIQUE I WANT TO DISCUSS IS  
the depiction of 'DUALITY'**

With the closing of the frontier and the impact of the Depression, Americans' self-image was forced to transform from 'rugged individualists' to members of the corporate welfare state.

Duality such as that seen in Superman through his alter-ego Clark Kent was a distinctive feature of American popular culture during the New Deal era of the 1930s. I argue that duality was a major feature of the 'canon' films and facilitated the negotiating of change in their spectators' political positions on war.

Freud<sup>16</sup> saw helping people make sense of major change as a key function of fiction, especially the populist genres. Around 1940 there was a proliferation of comic book superheroes with alternative quotidian identities like 1939's Batman and numerous others.

Double acts like Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Amos and Andy and Fred and Ginger were prevalent in popular entertainment. Two Major Studio productions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* were made by Hollywood in 1931 and 1941. Popular culture seemed to be reflecting the era's cultural transformation through its own polarised representations.

Duality is a motif that is prevalent amongst the "unequivocally anti-Nazi" movies of 1939-41.

Since the 1930s *zeitgeist* appeared to provide a fertile environment for representations of duality, could such a visual strategy have been deployed by anti-Nazi filmmakers in ways that advanced their political aims?

---

<sup>16</sup> Freud S (1953). *Creative Writers and Daydreaming in Standard Ed.*, vol 9. London: Hogarth, 149.

Amongst the 'canon', duality is a feature clearly evident in some of its most prominent films: *Underground*, *The Great Dictator*, *The Mortal Storm*, *Sergeant York*, *The Man I Married* and *Escape*.

**OF THE SIX FILMS IN THE CANON UTILISING THE DEVICE OF DUALITY, I WILL FOCUS HERE ON TWO: *THE MORTAL STORM* & *UNDERGROUND***

### *The Mortal Storm*

In *The Mortal Storm* (1940), members of a large, prosperous family in Germany are initially undifferentiated.

Stars Robert Young and Jimmy Stewart are linked through their common courtship of Margaret Sullavan's character Freya. But as these two young men begin to receive the camera's *individuated* gaze they are quickly distinguished.

*The Mortal Storm* is set in 1933 where, following a family dinner, radio reports of Hitler's ascension to power coincide with a visual bifurcation. Young is the first to applaud the news and stands claustrophobically close to the radio, listening eagerly and shot in stark blacks and whites. Opposition to this response is framed by the reverse shot of Freya's academic parents, joined by she and Stewart all looking concerned. Seen against floral wallpaper, its softer tones suggest the contrast in their lifeforce with Young's stark Blacks and Whites.

These signifiers of difference are reinforced by Young and Stewart's subsequent actions. Stewart remains resolutely apolitical in the face of 'pacifist' taunts and brave in defending an aged victim of a Nazi mob, while Young denies his conscience and eventually leads stormtroopers against Freya.

VISION – MORTAL STORM 'horse doctor' speech



Though ostensibly playing a German, Stewart's signifiers and actions make him an American *manqué*. Having been seen in Frank Capra's popular *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* just eight months earlier, Stewart's embodiment there of the political strength of the naïve American citizen, Jefferson Smith, also becomes, in Brunette and Wills' terminology, "invaginated (as "exterior and interior at the same time... an internalized pocket of externality") into the later film".

The contrasting representations of Nazis and Americans in *The Mortal Storm* naturalise an opposition that would shortly be re-enacted on the battlefield.

### Underground

In *Underground* (1941) two brothers are on either side of the German political divide. One secretly leads a clandestine anti-Nazi resistance movement and the other is an ardent Nazi soldier returned from the front with an amputated arm.

The brothers are initially strongly demarcated visually but after this is established, the film's visual strategies gradually bring them closer through a combination of two-shots and mirror images. This climaxes in a striking two-shot that highlights their strong visual similarities, but bisects them through the line of a vertical door frame and, by thus inviting comparison, effectively presents them as twins.

Shots following this bring them even closer, and one shot where they virtually merge, creates a vision of Janus, the Roman god of two faces. This twinning is a critical step in enabling audience empathy to flow to the Nazi brother, as it authorises *transference*.

As the Nazi brother is in the process of changing his political position, the effect is to oblige engaged viewers to do likewise and become, as he does, actively anti-Nazi.

### **Changing resisting viewers' political position**

So, having entered the hometown Odeon with a view opposing U.S. intervention in the European war, the resisting American viewer of these films may have, through these operations, found themselves becoming 'untethered' from their anti-war convictions. Their worldview was probably already changing from the perspective of the 'rugged individualist' to that of a corporatist citizen of America. If viewer movement between the polarities constructed in a 'canon' film was to occur, it would start with the film's use of duality making the issue of war a contestable site.

### **Did Hollywood do enough?**

On the question of whether the American film industry did enough, it can't be overlooked that the efforts it did make engendered a Senate enquiry convened by hostile <sup>17</sup> politicians.

In a typical American movie program anti-Nazi propaganda emanated not just from the feature film but also the cartoon, short film, newsreels and/or 'B' feature film. Intertextuality discussed in this paper shows how such individual cinematic texts can become mutually reinforcing and create synergies. What resulted was an atmosphere where "moviegoers were receiving a steady, one-sided dose of pro-war propaganda in various guises" <sup>18</sup>.

Whilst a partisan isolationist like John Flynn must have their rhetoric discounted to an extent, his claims such as the following cannot be discredited altogether:

“ these pictures... keep pounding at you like the man haranguing the mob in the streets, to get your hatreds in control of your reason and turn you loose on war”

---

<sup>17</sup> Birdwell, *Op Cit.*, 154-156.

<sup>18</sup> Koppes and Black, *Op Cit.*, 45-46.

Prewar reviews stress how “depressing” the ‘canon’ films were. While three - *The Great Dictator*, *Foreign Correspondent*, and *Sergeant York* were all major commercial successes, this leaves 75% of the ‘canon’ films that weren’t. Aldous Huxley’s biographer observed that when “powerful anti-Nazi films at last appeared – *Underground*, *The Mortal Storm* – they played to small audiences with picture-goers preferring *Strike Up The Band* and *Rebecca*”.

After Pearl Harbor and Nazi Germany’s declaration of war on America, the hostilities were not attributed to what Thomas Doherty called Hollywood’s “modest prewar cycle of anti-Nazi feature films”. On one criterion therefore, pro-war interventionism, their effort can be considered a failure. Antonio Gramsci says “political intuition is not expressed by the artist”. Klaus Mann pondered the failure of these films by conjecturing that perhaps, in the face of such a “macabre” evil as Nazi-ism, the only appropriate artistic response might have been surrealism.

Against the obstacles it faced, American cinema, in this paper’s view, did everything it could - but in this instance everything was not enough. No body of films drove the world into war. But the virtually unanimous support of the American population to tackle both Japan *and* Germany in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor arguably can be credited in part to Hollywood’s pre-war anti-Nazi propaganda films.

ENDS