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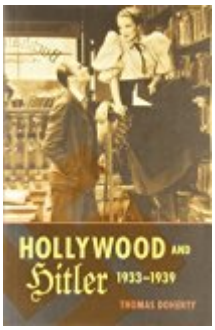
Thomas Doherty. *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939.* Film and Culture Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 448 pp. $22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-16393-4.



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Thomas Doherty's latest book is a study of how Hollywood "looked away" from political developments in Europe, in both feature films and newsreels, until the end of the 1930s, and how Nazism fitfully and belatedly came under the scrutiny of the camera's eye. Beginning with Nazi protests against the release of Universal's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) in Berlin, *Hollywood and Hitler* charts both continuities and shifts in Hollywood's approach to Germany. The story features striking juxtapositions of broad resistance to treatment of contentious material and, under the auspices of the Production Code Administration and "fair" treatment of other nations, as well as interventions from the German consul in Los Angeles, Georg Gyssling, specific avoidance of material that German authorities viewed as unflattering or offensive. Doherty's book also explores how Hollywood accommodated the racial discrimination of the Hitler state in terms of its personnel in Germany and through elimination of Jewish themes and credits to Jewish personnel in feature films. In addition, *Hollywood and Hitler* looks more broadly at issues of film and interwar European politics, devoting individual chapters to Benito Mussolini's son's 1937 visit to Hollywood, American films about the Spanish Civil War, and Leni Riefenstahl's visit to America in late 1938, respectively.

Hollywood and Hitler focuses on the exceptional cases of motion pictures, none of which proved box office successes, that thematized the Nazi threat, as well as an early anti-Nazi project (*The Mad Dog of Europe*, 1933) that was thwarted by resistance from the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and the Production Code Administration. The text also considers a number of feature films that illuminate the boundaries negotiated in Hollywood's ties with Nazi Germany, including *The House of Rothschild* (1934) and adaptations of sequels to Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front—The Road Back* (1937) and *Three Comrades* (1938). The anti-Nazi films of the 1930s, notably, *Hitler's Reign of Terror* (1934) and *I Was a Captive of Nazi Germany* (1936), were marginal in terms of produc-

tion values as well as theme. They lacked the funding, stars, and distribution network to win a broad audience. Only ***Confessions of a Nazi Spy*** (1939) came from a major studio (Warner Bros.). Doherty argues that it marked a shift insofar as it received Production Code approval despite German attempts to sabotage it, yet it came very late and failed to garner the kind of success that would have generated further interest in the subject.

Treatment of Nazi Germany in newsreels was similarly limited, partly because topical production likewise avoided contentious material and was cautious about causing offense. There was also a fundamental problem acquiring independent footage given Nazi control over what could be shot in Germany. The ***March of Time*** series, which from 1935 stood out for its coverage of Nazi Germany, above all in the outspokenly critical ***Inside Nazi Germany*** (January 1938), relied on images that at face value celebrated life in the Third Reich. The contrast between the images and the critical voice-over provoked disagreement over whether the picture even qualified as anti-Nazi, as its producers asserted. For instance, cameramen in the Spanish Civil War shot much more candid and revealing footage.

A central theme of the book is that Hollywood's hands-off approach to Nazism can be explained in terms not necessarily specific to Hitler's Germany. Motion picture corporations generally avoided immediately contentious issues so as not to limit their market or risk having their films found on the wrong side of a dispute. Although the past could serve as a parable for the present—Doherty considers a series of shorts from Warner Bros. on episodes from American history with allegorical significance for current threats to liberty and democracy—controversy damaging to commercial ties was a risk to be avoided. In this case it was a palpable risk insofar as Germany applied pressure to protect its image. This consideration goes some way to explain the otherwise baffling willingness of companies with Jews in founding and/or leading positions to replace Jewish personnel in Germany and "coordinate" their production to make it agreeable to German interests and suitable for release in Germany. Of the major studios with substantial commitments in Germany, only Warner Bros. cut its ties early in the Nazi era.

Doherty suggests that over and above commercial considerations, Hollywood's approach to Nazism reflects a "failure of nerve and imagination" (p. 12). Thus, the general impulse to maximize its audience and specific anxiety about damage to its place in the German market were accompanied by weakness, which was difficult to justify in the face of Nazi racial policy and antisemitic violence. This last point is underscored in the argument that the events of 1938—German annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland and the violence against German Jews in the "Night of Broken Glass"—were responsible for belated attention in newsreels and the emergence of a broad anti-Nazi consensus in Hollywood which corresponded to a wider shift in public opinion thanks to information provided by other media.

Apart from its assessment of American motion pictures that addressed contemporary German themes, ***Hollywood and Hitler i***s most illuminating in its discussion of the accommodation of American film companies after 1933 to a regime that was violently hostile to Jews; for its investigation of the role of the Production Code Administration and the interventions of the German consul, Gyssling, in discouraging or sanitizing filmic treatment of Germany; and for its attention to contemporary commentary on public response to newsreels that did present Hitler or Nazism on screen. It gives less attention to the bilateral relationship of Hollywood and Hitler's Germany and the role of American films in Nazi Germany, topics on which the recent study by Ben Urwand, ***The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler*** (2013), provides further research. Its perspective

on the German film industry is also largely that of contemporary American trade papers. These provide valuable insights into American perceptions and concerns, but they offer a limited picture of Nazi cinema. Although the German film industry did experience an immediate, significant loss from the exodus of Jewish creative personnel from Germany in 1933, it sustained a diverse and popular production program through the Nazi era.

Also noteworthy is that the German film industry, no less than Hollywood, was interested in the commercial mainstream. The minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, shared with Hollywood moguls the resistance to political entertainment, at least of an overt kind (in Germany, too, historical films proved useful patriotic allegories). Nazi uniforms and insignia were generally absent from mainstream feature films. In this respect, Riefenstahl's paeans to National Socialism made her more outsider than paragon of the industry. As Doherty suggests, to the extent that German imports received very limited exhibition in the United States, it was not because they advertised Nazi credentials. Other factors, again primarily commercial, explain their peripheral role in American cinemas.

To these parallels in entertainment strategy can be added similarities in the role of censorship, with, of course, the crucial exception of the regulations by which Jews were excluded from the German motion picture industry and German censors banned material judged offensive to National Socialism. Doherty observes that in its "aversion to civic upheaval and moral transgression, Nazi censorship was no more or no less onerous than the edicts handed down by the Chicago Board of Censors or the Kansas State Board of Review" (pp. 25-26). He also indicates that in many respects Nazi censorship continued the practices of its predecessors. It is noteworthy, for instance, that Gyssling's interventions after 1933 cited the German censorship law of 1932, thus a pre-Nazi regulation.

In its conclusion, ***Hollywood and Hitler*** summarizes its narrative as one of how a "great art-industry confronted a profound moral quandary—cooperating with, looking away from, and, ultimately, facing up to a menace beyond its imagination" (p. 373). On the evidence presented here, this art-industry overwhelmingly sidestepped the moral question, facing up to it only when a broad consensus eliminated the quandary and when commercial ties with Germany lost value. In the 1930s, Hollywood followed rather than led in shaping imaginations of Nazi Germany.

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