Memorializing Genocide I: Earlier Holocaust Documentaries

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1. Introduction

As I write this review essay, Holocaust Memorial Day (May 5, 2016) has just passed. At this time when anti-Semitism is evidently on the rise again in Europe,[1] it seems appropriate to review some of the cinematic record we have of this murderous episode in the history of humankind. In this first of a two-part series, I review four of the most useful Holocaust documentaries, addressing a number of pertinent issues they raise. We are lucky that a number of excellent old documentaries showing the horrors of the Nazi crimes against humanity in general (and the Holocaust in particular) have now been made readily available.[2] The ones that I will examine here include two early documentaries produced by the U.S. War Department contemporaneous with the liberation of the death camps, a classic French film from 1955, and a 1973-1974 British television documentary. I intend to explain which of these documentaries work well as effective film, and exactly why they do so. I will also explain why one was a relative failure, in that it was shown only briefly, and explore an ambiguity in the term 'Holocaust' that informs how these films document the mass murders by the Nazi Regime.

[1] I sketched this rise in Gary James Jason, "Disquieting Developments," *Liberty*, April 22, 2015, accessed online at: http://www.libertyunbound.com/node/1404.

[2] They are available for purchase through specialty film outlets, as well as through Amazon.com. The three best specialty outlets are: International Historic Films Inc., at: http://www.IHFfilm.com; Artsmagic Limited, at: http://www.artsmagicdvd.net; and The History Channel's internet store, at: http://www.shophistorystore.com. Moreover, many of these documentaries are available for free viewing on Youtube.com.

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2. Contemporaneous U.S. War Films

Let's start with the two Holocaust documentaries made by the U.S. War Department at the end of World War II, using footage taken by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the branch of the Army tasked with not just facilitating communications, but also filming major Army actions. The first was *Death Mills* (1945). This short film was directed by the great German émigré director Billy Wilder (1906-2002) at the behest of the U.S. War Department.[3]

A brief sketch of Wilder's life is in order here. Born Samuel Wilder in Sucha (in what is now Poland), he went into journalism, winding up in Berlin in 1926. In 1929, he broke into the German movie industry as a scriptwriter. In response to the rise of the Nazi Party, he moved first to Paris briefly and then to Hollywood in 1933, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1934. He started writing scripts in 1938, including for the hits *Ninotchka* (1939), *Hold Back the Dawn* (1942), and *Ball of Fire* (1942). He got his first directorial job in 1942 for *The Major and the Minor*. Wilder both directed (and often co-wrote) major classics, including *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *Stalag 17* (1954), *Sabrina* (1954), *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), and *The Apartment* (1960). During his career, he won six Oscars, the AFI Life Achievement Award, the Irving Thalberg Award, and the Medal of Arts.

Wilder served as a colonel in the U.S. Army's Psychological Warfare Department (PWD) in 1945. The Department of War especially wanted him for the production of the first concentration camp documentary. This documentary was intended primarily to be shown to German audiences as part of the post-war de-Nazification program (see Section 5 below). Wilder—whose mother, stepfather, and grandmother were all killed in the camps (as he discovered while serving in Berlin)—directed the short documentary *Death Mills.* The film, which includes footage of nearly one dozen camps, was compiled from footage taken by the Allied forces when they liberated the concentration camps as the war came to an end.[4]

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[3] Production details can be found in "Death Mills," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/Wiki/Death_Mills.

[4] Ibid.

The film opens with the printed statement (inter-title), "This is a translation of a film called '*Death Mills*' which our State Department is showing to the German people. It is a reminder that behind the curtain of Nazi pageants and parades, millions of men, women and children were tortured to death—the worst mass murder in human history." The inter-title fades to a scene showing what the narrator explains are townspeople of Gardelegen (Germany) carrying crosses to a local barn containing the remains of 1,100 victims of the nearby concentration camp. The narrator explains that this is just a fraction of the 20 million people killed in over 300 camps run by the Nazis.[5]

We then see recently liberated prisoners in their striped prison camp garb cheering, and the infamous "Arbeit Macht Frei" ("Work sets you free") motto on the main gate. The narrator notes that many were freed only to die from their prior starvation and abuse. "They had been beaten down to live like animals," the narrator intones over a scene of ex-prisoners digging into a cart full of potatoes. As Allied soldiers carry out the sick, we see a man crying with hands folded together carried on a litter. We see more victims, including women, and many are dead.

We next see Allied doctors examining horribly starved prisoners at Auschwitz. The film cuts to scenes of major Allied military and other leaders witnessing instruments of torture and piles of dead bodies. We see also piles of bones, "the foul wretched remnants of human beings." We see the torture chamber at Majdanek, as well as the gas chambers (disguised as showers) together with pictures of Zyklon gas canisters, and the crematoria where the bodies were destroyed—crematoria kept running night and day "like blast furnaces at Pittsburgh."

The narrator then notes that the Nazis tried to profit from their victims. We see pictures of how the bones were ground up to be used as fertilizer by German farmers. The prisoners' clothes were stripped and later sold, as were shoes and children's toys and dolls. We see bags of women's hair cut before they were gassed. We see the storage room at Buchenwald, where the Nazis kept the jewelry and watches they stole from the prisoners. We also see heaps of gold teeth, with a soldier

[5] The currently accepted figure is about 11 million victims in total, 6 million of which were Jews; see, e.g., Jennifer Rosenberg, "What You Need to Know about the Holocaust," accessed online at: http://history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/holocaust_facts.htm; and "The Holocaust," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust.

emptying out a box of gold teeth and fillings that had been extracted from the camp's victims.

The fact of profiting from their victims raises an often overlooked aspect of the Nazi reign. "Nazi" means "National Socialist." The targeting of Jews and other groups helped to solidify the regime's nationalistic side of the Nazi ideology. The socialist side of it was that in killing Jews and others, the regime collected much-needed assets with which to pursue its militaristic agenda. Every prisoner killed—often enslaved and worked to death for German manufacturing—allowed the regime to enact a virtually 100% tax on that victim. The regime took everything the victim had to take, from personal property, labor, and harvesting of their dead bodies to bank accounts, stock and bond portfolios, real estate, and businesses.[6]

The film shows us how, as the Allied armies advanced, the Nazis tried to ship the prisoners elsewhere or kill them quickly so that there would be no witnesses left. There were railroad cars still filled with corpses and corpses alongside the trains, murdered "just before liberation." We watch the Belsen camp commander, along with captured male and female camp guards, being paraded down the street, as the narrator asks, "What sub-humans did these things?"

A survivor of one of the camps gives testimony as the allied guards bring in the camp commander and the camp doctor. The Nazis show no remorse when confirming that they injected poison into the prisoners. Members of the Wartime Crimes unit open graves of thousands of prisoners from various camps, the narrator observing that the methods include suffocation, shooting, injection of poison, starvation, and burning. For those who lived to see liberation, life for many of them was either brief—as thousands died from aid arriving too late—or tragically marred. We are shown women who survived with "wounds as ghastly as any on the battlefield"; children at Auschwitz, made orphans by the Nazis, and now only identified by the "numbers tattooed on their arms"; and emaciated men, one "with his eyes gouged out by the Nazis."

At Weimar, the narrator reports, all of the adult citizens were forced to visit the nearby camp: "They started the trip as if they were going on a picnic; after all, it was only a short walk from any German city to the nearest concentration camp." They were forced to walk by

[6] Götz Aly explores this in a recent treatise; see his *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

the rows of corpses and smell the decomposition. Many of the citizens show horror or shame as they tour the camps. Here the film pushes a theme of collective guilt (which I discuss below in Section 5), when the narrator says:

> These Germans, the ones who said they didn't know, were responsible too. They had put themselves gladly into the hands of criminals and lunatics. They tell you now that they meant no evil; that they know nothing of what was going on, or could not do anything about it if they did. But the farmers who received tons of ash as fertilizer apparently never suspected it came from human beings; the manufacturers received tons of human hair, but apparently never dreamed that it came from the heads of murdered women. No nightmares ever haunted the dreams of those who lived near concentration camps—the cries and moans of the tortured were no doubt believed to be the wailing of the wind.

We see images of the big Nazi rally at Nuremburg, as the narrator says, "Yesterday, while millions were dying in concentration camps, Germans jammed Nuremberg to cheer the Nazi Party and sing hymns of hate." The film shows over the image of the Nazi rallies cut-in scenes of the shamed and horrified Weimar townspeople as they are forced to walk through the camps. The narrator continues, "Today, these Germans who cheered the destruction of humanity in their own land, cheered the attack on helpless neighbors, cheered the enslavement of Europe, plead for your sympathy. They are the same Germans who once Heiled Hitler."

The film ends with scenes of townspeople carrying crosses for the graves of prisoners, as the narrator intones, "Remember, if they bear heavy crosses now, they are the crosses of the millions crucified in the Nazi death mills." Wilder presents these images and narration against a stark, somber musical backdrop, a classical military march repeated over and over. This soundtrack serves to heighten the effect of an already powerful short documentary. As powerful as Wilder's documentary is, though, it was shown only briefly in Germany (in January of 1946),[7] and then left to languish in obscurity. (I will explore below in Section 5 why *Death Mills* had this fate.)

[7] See "Death Mills."

Another, even more powerful, documentary on our list is *Nazi Concentration Camps* (1945). It shows the variety of camps: prisoner of war, slave labor, and extermination. It's outstanding for its scope, unflinching accuracy, and directness. One reason for the power of this documentary is the quality of its director, legendary George Stevens.[8] Stevens was born in 1904, and dropped out of school to be an actor in his parents' touring stock theater company. After his family moved to Los Angeles, he broke into the movie business as an assistant cameraman at the Hal Roach Studios in 1921. Stevens directed his first feature-length film in 1934, and from then on until he joined the Army in World War II, he directed increasingly important films, such as *Swing Time* (1936), *Gunga Din* (1939), *Vigil in the Night* (1940), *Penny Serenade* (1941), *Woman of the Year* (1942), *The Talk of the Town* (1942), and *The More the Merrier* (1943).

Stevens joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1943, serving under General Dwight Eisenhower. His stature as a filmmaker led to him being given a film unit to head, with assignments such as filming the landing on D-Day, the liberation of Paris, the meeting of the American and Soviet Armies at the Elbe River, and the liberation of the Duben and Dachau concentration camps. He helped prepare the film material used in the Nuremberg Trials. Out of this material, he created three documentaries in 1945: *That Justice Be Done*, *The Nazi Plan*, and *Nazi Concentration Camps*. Unlike the first two, the third was specifically intended for general release in America.

After the war, and very likely because of what he had seen in it, Stevens directed no comedies or musicals. Instead, he directed major serious works: *A Place in the Sun* (1951), *Shane* (1953), *Giant* (1956), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), and *The Only Game in Town* (1970). Indeed, he remarked in 1964 of his wartime experience, "It must have changed my outlook entirely. Films were very much less important to me." He won several Oscars and other major film awards. For his film work in World War II, Stevens received the Legion of Merit. In 2008, the Library of Congress

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[8] See "George Stevens," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Stevens; and the PBS American Masters entry on him, accessed online at: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/george-stevens/about-george-stevens/710/.

entered his footage into the U.S. National Film Registry, characterizing it as an "essential film record" of the war.

Nazi Concentration Camps was made at the specific request of General Eisenhower. He wanted Stevens to make a film to convince the people back home that these atrocities really occurred, since there had been a lot of false propaganda about German atrocities during the war. This documentary was also used as evidence at the Nuremberg trials.

The film opens with pictures of several affidavits. One is by Robert H. Jackson, stating that the film the audience is about to see is "an official documentary report compiled from films made by military photographers serving with the Allied armies." Another is by George Stevens, explaining that he was in charge of the teams of photographers who took this footage and that it is accurate and unaltered. There is a third one, by E. R. Kellogg, the film's editor, that the 6,000 feet of film used to make it were taken from 80,000 feet taken by the Army photographers, confirming that it is representative and unaltered. The film displays on a map of Europe the names of the 300 biggest Nazi concentration camps. Although we'll view the conditions of fourteen selected camps, the narrator tells us that these are representative of the general conditions that prevailed at all of the camps.

At Ohrdruf, over 4,000 prisoners were starved or beaten to death. We see Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton inspecting the facility just liberated by Patton's troops, viewing the rack used to hold prisoners while the prisoners were being beaten, and talking with survivors. They then view a shed containing stacked, emaciated bodies of victims, with Patton showing a look of disgust and anger. Former inmates demonstrate how they were tortured. The narrator quotes Eisenhower, who told the U.S. Congresspeople visiting the camp, "I want you to see for yourselves and be the spokesmen for the United States." The assembled party looks at the make-shift crematorium for the camp, with the charred remains of its prisoners. Local townspeople, including the town's top Nazi officials, are forced to tour the camp. They view the pile of bodies of prisoners who were massacred as the Allied troops approached. Some of the officials are visibly shocked, but most show no emotion and deny knowledge of what went on in the camp. The narrator tells us that the day before, the town's mayor and his wife were forced to tour the camp—and that evening committed suicide.

At Hadamar, which operated "under the guise of an insane asylum," 35,000 prisoners (mainly Poles, Russians, and Germans) were killed. We see Army personnel attending to those still barely alive. They reveal unmistakable signs of starvation, and we see bodies from the graveyard containing 20,000 victims being exhumed for autopsy. The film mentions for the first time gas chambers used to kill the prisoners and the narrator notes that the Nazis themselves kept detailed "death books" recording the killings. The camp doctor is interrogated; we learn that he often injected large doses of morphine as a method of killing prisoners and then buried them twenty to a grave. The doctor admits that no effort was made to make sure that the prisoners were all dead (as opposed to merely being comatose) before they were buried. The narrator informs us that when the ten thousandth victim was killed, the Hadamar staff held a celebration.

Nordhausen was a slave labor camp where thousands died; only about two thousand inmates survived to be liberated, and almost all of them required medical care. The filthy, cramped barracks are shown, and again the inmates were obviously starved. We view more piles of emaciated corpses, with a few prisoners still barely alive. Some were too far gone from starvation and sickness to live much past liberation. The mayor of the nearby town was ordered to provide hundreds of adult men to bury 2,500 corpses lying in heaps, and we watch them grimly doing this job. We finish with soldiers standing silently over long pits which will serve as common graves for the dead prisoners.

At Mauthausen, a liberated American naval officer testifies that although he was in uniform when captured, he was beaten savagely by the Gestapo and sent to the extermination camp. He tells us that two other American soldiers were also sent there and were killed in the gas chambers (as he displays their dog tags). When asked how the prisoners in the camp were killed, he answers that they were killed by gassing, shooting, beating, exposure, starvation, dog attacks, and by being pushed off a cliff.

The scenes and testimony of witnesses from Buchenwald, Dachau, and Belsen are especially horrific. At Belsen, for example, we see such extensive piles of corpses that bulldozers had to be brought in to push them into common graves. The narrator's last words are, "This was Bergin/Belsen," and the film ends silently with another showing of the film editor's affidavit of accuracy.

3. A Classic French Film

The third film reviewed here is the classic 1955 French documentary *Night and Fog*, by eminent director Alain Resnais.[9] Resnais, generally categorized as a French New Wave director, studied acting and then film editing. After serving in the newly liberated French military for a year, he returned to Paris to start work as a film director. Resnais directed about twenty acclaimed films, ranging from *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) to his final film, *Aimer, Boire, et Chanter* (2014).

Night and Fog opens with a contemporary scene of a peaceful field, but as the camera pans back, we see barbed wire and the narrator says, "Even a peaceful landscape, even an ordinary field with crows flying over it . . . can lead to a concentration camp." We now see the electric fences, the guard-tower, and the main buildings of a camp. As the narrator names some of the major camps, he adds, "The blood has dried, the tongues are silent . . . . Weeds have grown where the prisoners used to walk. The wire is no longer live . . . . [N]o footfall is heard but our own."

The film cuts to scenes of parading Nazis, as the announcer notes that in 1933 "the machine gets under way." We see more pageantry and rallies and a field with a few men walking through it, while the narrator says,

> A concentration camp is built like a stadium or Grand Hotel. You need contractors, estimates, competitive offers . . . . Meanwhile, Burger, the German laborer; Stern, the Jewish student from Amsterdam; Schmulski from Cracow; Annette, the high school girl from Bordeaux, go on living their everyday lives ignorant that there's a place for them.

We now view people being rounded up, as the narrator identifies their cities of origin. They board the cattle cars for the trip to the camps, as Nazi soldiers check their papers and guard them. Many of the prisoners have the Star of David on their coats.

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[9] For biographical details, see Brian Baxter, "Alain Resnais Obituary," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2014, accessed online at: http://theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/02/alain-resnais; and "Alain Resnais," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_Resnais.

Trains then leave the stations, "anonymous trains, their doors well-locked, a hundred deportees to every wagon." Along the way, some die—"Death makes its first pick . . . . Chooses again, upon arrival in the night and fog." Over the camp gates, we see the mocking "Arbeit Macht Frei." As the narrator states, "First sight of the camp—another planet," we see a mass of prisoners crammed into its main square. Naked prisoners wait for the showers: "Nakedness . . . and the individual, humiliated, is surrendered to the camp. . . . Shaved, tattooed, numbered." The prisoners are then dressed in blue-and-white striped uniforms—the "night and fog" colors referred to in the film's title.

The narrator informs us that the prisoners soon learn their place in a whole new hierarchy, where ordinary criminals are higher than the other prisoners. The highest-ranking prisoners are the capos, ordinary German criminals who aided the Nazi SS in exchange for a privileged position in the camps. Above them are the SS troops, and at the very top is the camp commandant.

We are shown contemporary scenes of the empty camp barracks and other buildings, as the narrator describes life for the prisoners, and then cut back to footage of prisoners crammed into bunks and marched under harsh conditions to work in the morning. We also witness horrifying images: meager rations the prisoners receive; latrines they are forced to use; children orphaned by the killings of prisoners; dead prisoners draped over electric fencing; naked, starved prisoners at roll call, camp gallows, and execution yard.

The next scene is the camp hospital, where prisoners faced "the risk of death by syringe" and got little true medical aid. As we watch an SS doctor and nurse in this pseudo-clinic, the narrator trenchantly avers, "What's behind the set-up and scenes? Useless operations, amputations, experimental mutilations." We learn how the inmates were experimented upon, poisoned, castrated, and burned with phosphorous.

In a dramatic cut, we jump to 1942 and pictures of high-level Nazis. Heinrich Himmler arrives to give the orders to start the mass exterminations. The prisoners are forced to build the very gas chambers and crematoria which for the next three years will be used to destroy them. A series of ghastly scenes is presented: the European-wide mass deportations by train, the division of prisoners upon arrival into those to be killed immediately and those to be worked mercilessly before being killed, gas chambers with their ceilings "scratched by fingernails," crematoria ovens, heaps of prisoners' belongings, a group

of beheaded corpses with their heads in a basket, soap made from human fat, and pointed parchment made from human skin.

The Nazi regime pushes hard in 1945 to complete its self-appointed task of genocide, but it loses the war. We observe what the Allies found when they open the camp doors: carpets of corpses. There are so many that bulldozers must be used to push the bodies into mass graves. Survivors look at us through barbed wire, while the narrator asks, "Will life know them again?" Footage of the capos and SS officers in court show them denying that they were responsible for the atrocities, after which the narrator queries, "Who is responsible then?" The film ends with contemporary scenes of concentration camp ruins, as the narrator talks about our fallible and evanescent memory (a theme Resnais was fond of exploring):

> Somewhere in our midst lucky capos survive, recuperated [SS] officers as anonymous informers. . . . There are those reluctant to believe or believing from time to time. . . . There are those of us who look at these ruins today as though the old concentration [camp] monster were dead and buried beneath them.

This film was highly acclaimed; it won the Prix Jean Vigo in 1956 and fellow director Francois Truffaut called it the greatest film ever made.[10] This praise is well deserved for several reasons. The dialogue is moving, almost lyrical in places; the writer, Jean Cayrol, was himself a camp survivor. The cinematography is effective and well edited, with contemporary color footage of the abandoned camps mixed with original stock footage taken by both the liberating armies and the Nazis. The score is quietly haunting. Moreover, the film has an understated tone, which accentuates the images presented, possessing an emotional depth most of the others don't.

4. A British TV Gem

The next documentary under review was produced by a British company, Thames Television, as part of the highly acclaimed, extended 1973-1974 series *The World at War*. The documentary, titled *Genocide: 1941-1945*, was episode 20 of the first season of the series. Written by Charles Bloomberg, directed by Michael Darlow, and narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier, it differs from the films discussed

[10] Baxter, "Alain Resnais Obituary."

above in featuring a number of fascinating interviews with survivors of the Holocaust as well as two ex-members of the SS: Karl Wolff and Wilhelm Hottl. It also differs from the others in that it focuses on the Nazi genocide of the Jews specifically, adopting a historical perspective and examining the development of Nazi racial theory and the creation of the SS. All of these features, coupled with the quality of its footage, make it an outstanding documentary.

The film opens with a view of Dachau, as the narrator reads a surviving prisoner's words: "What we went through will be difficult to understand even for our contemporaries, and much more difficult for the generations that have no personal experience from those days." *Genocide*, with its shocking footage and copious interviews, goes a long way toward bridging that gap in understanding.

The film opens in the Nazi Party offices in 1929, where we meet Heinrich Himmler. Himmler joined the party in 1923, two years after Hitler became its head. Himmler began as deputy propaganda chief, refining the Nazi ideology in general and Nazi race theory in particular. Later that year, he was chosen to head the SS. It had been set up in 1925 as the personal bodyguards of Hitler, and had several leaders before Himmler. He was the one who turned it into a formidable paramilitary organization.[11]

We hear an interview with Wolff, a much-decorated SS officer. He was personally recruited by Himmler, and became his personal adjutant. Wolff describes his involvement, and we learn how Himmler planned to use the SS to inspire a new vision of a glorious Germany.

The film then describes the pseudo-science supporting the regime's ideology—a kind of neo-Darwinian eugenicist race theory, or what one might call Aryan social Darwinism. Here we see scenes from a German movie of the time, *Only the Fittest Survive*, showing animals fighting to the death. The narrator says this was to be applied to humans, too, as we see scenes of German youth being examined by doctors and marching in parades. The idea was "to develop a better race, a race of supermen." Here we cut back to Wolff, who claims that this program of racial improvement was thought of only in a positive sense of breeding the best, as opposed to killing those "who had been born without a white skin, or was culturally inferior, or was undesirable."

[11] For more details of the history of the SS, see "The SS," *History.com*, accessed online at: http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/ss.

We watch an elaborate SS parade, as the narrator tells us that the SS was tasked with creating a racially pure Europe. The SS was modeled in some ways on the Jesuit order, including an elaborate ranking system and punishments for infractions. (The film doesn't note this, but in fact at Dachau there was a section of the camp reserved for SS troops who disobeyed orders or failed in some other way.) The narrator points out that the SS ran the camps. First incarcerated were the dissidents. The SS "schooled themselves in brutality," systematically brutalizing and dehumanizing the prisoners, giving them numbers instead of names.

We now cut to the Reichstag in 1935, where Goring spells out the Nuremberg Laws. Marriage, even sex, between the pure Aryans and the impure Jews is now illegal in Germany. We see some of the crude, vicious anti-Semitic cartoons of the time. The Nazis amplified the latest racism in Germany and used it to buttress their support. We see some enlightening footage of German schoolchildren looking at textbooks contrasting pure Aryans and "degenerate" Jews.

Kristallnacht, the 1938 nationwide regime-backed pogrom, leads to all adult male Jews being rounded up and forced to march to the concentration camps. At this point, most (if not all) Jews understood how targeted they were, and many emigrated—but "not many countries opened their doors to the Jews." And, as ex-SS Major Hottl reveals, while he worked to make it easier for Jews to emigrate, Adolf Eichmann—who at this point controlled emigration policy—made it more difficult, including imposing steep exit taxes on them.

In January, 1939, Hitler "threatens a new solution to the Jewish problem: if world Jewry drags Germany into another world war that will be the end of the Jews in Europe." That September, Germany rapidly took Poland, which is slated by the Nazis to be colonized and rid of its large Jewish population. The Nazis instituted ruthless terror, with mass executions, leading to Poles of German ancestry going to Germany, while the rest of the Poles—Slavs and Jews—moved to designated areas to be used as forced labor, "with Jews at the bottom of the heap." In Poland, in 1940-1941, the Jews were now forced into ghettoes. The ghettoes were then sealed by walls and barbed wire, and the Jews crammed in—often three families (with children) to a room. They were starved, beaten, and terrorized.

In 1941, the Wehrmacht invaded Russia. More resettlements of Jews and Slavs rapidly follow. We hear from Wolff again, saying that "in Poland we found 3 million Jews, in Russia 5 million more." The SS set up execution squads—the Einsatzgruppen—to shoot Jews wherever

they were found, and we see scenes of Jews stripped and shot. Wolff tells us that once, while Himmler was touring a Polish killing camp containing Jews and Soviet POWs to see how efficiently the killing was being done, Himmler was splattered by brain tissue and blood from one of the victims, and nearly fainted. The Nazis rapidly came to view the shooting of the prisoners as "inefficient," however, so at the Wannsee Conference of 1942, plans were made for more efficient killing techniques. Eichmann was appointed administrator of this "final solution of the Jewish problem": they were all to be gassed. The whole European Nazi camp system was to be used to execute this plan. In the East, new camps were set up and existing camps expanded for the mass slaughter. The biggest was at Auschwitz. The film explains how Eichmann used the railway system for this purpose. We see pictures of the actual plans for the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz.

The film has extensive footage of the round-ups, with survivors recollecting their experiences. We see scenes of what happened when they arrived: healthy people were put to one side (to be worked to death as slave labor), and the old, infirm, very young, and pregnant women were put to the other side, and taken away to be gassed. The gassing is described calmly by ex-SS Major Hottl. The remaining Jews were worked to death, starved, beaten, shot, and often (as we are shown) threw themselves on the electric fences.

Anthony Eden, a high British official, recalls that as reports of these atrocities came out, they were initially disbelieved or viewed as exaggeration. But as the reports grew, by the end of 1942 a joint statement was simultaneously issued in all Allied capitals condemning the atrocities and promising to punish those responsible after the war.

The film next shows us the camp at Theresienstadt, and the Theresienstadt ghetto, located in what is now the Czech Republic.[12] It was set up in 1941 primarily as a holding camp, where prisoners were held until they could be shipped to the extermination camps (Auschwitz and Treblinka)—although tens of thousands of its inmates died from starvation, sickness, and shootings. Besides the prisoners in transit to the death camps, Theresienstadt held Jews (often elderly or infirm) from Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany who either had

[12] For a detailed history of this camp, see "Theresienstadt Concentration Camp," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theresienstadt_concentration_camp; and "Theresienstadt," accessed online at: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005424.

distinguished German military records or were famous in the arts and other areas of Germany's prewar cultural scene. These prisoners got somewhat better treatment than inmates of the other camps.

The reason for this is that Theresienstadt served as a Nazi propaganda device for deceiving the German public and the outside world at large. The Nazis presented it in one propaganda film as a "spa town," where elderly Jews could retire, and where other Jews worked in peace running their own city. The Nazi cover story was that Jews were being resettled in the East where they would do "useful" (forced) labor. The film shows us footage from a German propaganda film made in 1943 with well-dressed and healthy-looking Jews, in the library or working in the gardens. The narrator notes that "by the time this film was released, most of the people seen here were already dead in the gas chambers at Auschwitz."

By 1944, the Nazis knew they were losing in all theaters of operation, and accelerated the deportation of Jews from occupied Europe. The trains now went straight to the death camps. The film presents more survivor testimony. As survivor Dov Paisikowic puts it, "There we saw Hell on this Earth." The film recounts the liberation of Majdanek by the Soviets in 1944, and we see horrific footage taken by them of the victims. Only a couple of hundred miles away, the extermination at Auschwitz continued faster than ever. The Soviet Army finally liberated Auschwitz in 1945.

The film shows Hottl explaining that when Himmler was told that six million had been killed in the concentration camps and by the Einsatzgruppen, he was disappointed and set up his own statistics bureau to keep track.

By the middle of 1945, the Allies liberated virtually all of the camps. We see more footage of liberated prisoners—emaciated, sick, and pathetic. As the film ends, we see that iconic footage of bulldozers pushing heaps of corpses into a mass grave.

This film is distinguished by the quality of the historical footage, but also by the retrospective testimony of both surviving victims and perpetrators. I will return to this point in my concluding remarks.

5. Collective Guilt versus De-Nazification

These documentaries raise a number of interesting issues, two of which I shall address. In this section, I take up the question I raised above in Section 2 about why *Death Mills* was shown only briefly and faded into obscurity. (In the next section, I will address the issue of

Jewish people being the primary target of the Holocaust.) In order to explain why *Death Mills* had this fate, we need to discuss several ancillary issues: the Allied de-Nazification campaign, shaming, and collective guilt.

The de-Nazification (and demilitarization) program was outlined in the 1945 Potsdam Agreement before the end of the war. The term was coined by the U.S. Pentagon in 1943 to mean removing Nazi doctrines and influence from the legal system, but it came to mean the extirpation of Nazi influence throughout German society—its culture, legal system, political system, economic system, and educational system.[13] The scale of the process was vast. It had to be, because at least 8.5 million Germans had been Nazi Party members. When you count Nazi-run organizations—including the German Labor Front, the Hitler Youth, the League of German Women, and the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization—the total was upward of 45 million German citizens.[14]

In 1945, in Western Germany, about 223,000 government agency and business officials were quickly stripped of their positions, permitted to do only "lowly" work. Then, 180,000 Germans were imprisoned in internment camps. In the East (which was occupied by the Soviets), 200,000 government agency and business officials were stripped of their positions, and 30,000 quickly tried for war crimes. The Soviets actually reopened notorious Nazi concentration camps such as Sachsenhausen; they started by incarcerating former Nazis, but soon thereafter imprisoned opponents of their new German puppet regime.[15]

However, by late 1945, it was clear to the occupiers of Western Germany that the country was unable to function with so many key personnel missing. Also, the workload of processing millions of forms that the Germans had been required to fill out was proving to be intractable. So in early 1946, the Western Allies turned

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[13] See "Denazification," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denazification.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Theo Sommer, "New Life Blossoms in the Ruins. Germany After the Surrender: a Tough Start into a New Epoch," *The Atlantic Times*, May 2005, accessed online at: http://www.atlantic-times.com/archive_detail.php?recordID=209.

the process over to the Germans. The Germans then streamlined the process—or watered it down, depending on your perspective.[16] Still, even in 1947, the occupiers of Western Germany held 90,000 accused Nazis in detention, and forbade another 1,900,000 to work in anything but menial labor. All of this was offensive to many Germans, naturally, and many of them called it "victor's justice."[17] By 1948, the American forces expedited the remaining cases by summary proceedings. The new West German government (founded in 1949) ended the formal judicial proceedings in 1951. (The Soviet de-Nazification program ended at about the same time.)

There are a number of geopolitical reasons why the de-Nazification campaign was shortened by the Western Allies. First, by 1946, there was substantial domestic pressure in the U.S. especially to bring home the troops (the deadline set to bring the bulk of all American troops home was 1947). Second, it proved simply impossible to evaluate, much less put on trial, every Nazi collaborator.[18] Attempting to prosecute so many ex-Nazi officials caused shortages of key personnel, which in turn impeded West Germany's economic recovery. Most importantly, by 1948 there was a new war to be fought—the Cold War, dramatically underscored by the 1948 Berlin Air Lift. At this point, the need for the complete support of the West Germans made the Allies eliminate their role in the remaining de-Nazification program. The Allied de-Nazification campaign, which General Eisenhower projected would take fifty years, ended after only three. Was the campaign a success?

In the narrow sense of bringing to justice all (or most, or even the most important) of the people who committed crimes against the Jews (and all of the other Nazi-targeted groups), the campaign failed. Of the 3.5 million Germans the Allies indicted, for example, not even one million went to trial; of these, only 9,600 were sent to prison for long terms. Of those few, over 95% were paroled by 1949.[19] Especially egregious is the fact that half of the top SS officers got away

[16] "Denazification."

[17] Ibid.

[18] See "World War II Aftermath in Germany: Denazification," accessed online at: http://histclo.com/essay/war/ww2/after/ger/ga-dn.html.

[19] Ibid.

completely free, including all of Eichmann's deputies and all of the commanders of the Einsatzgruppen, the "killing squads" who shot massive numbers of Jews on the Eastern front.

In the broader sense, though, the de-Nazification campaign did succeed. The West German (and later, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German) government acknowledged openly (and continues to this day to acknowledge) the Holocaust and other war crimes. It honestly pursued (and continues to pursue) anti-Nazi policies, including reparations to surviving Jews. Most importantly, Germany became and has continued to be a genuine democracy, with secure human rights to free speech, freedom of mobility, freedom of religion, and so on. It is a democracy within which the Nazi movement has never come even close to reasserting itself. Nor has Germany threatened (much less invaded) any other countries.

Against this general historical backdrop, we can take up the issue of why Wilder's documentary was shown only briefly at the start of the de-Nazification campaign. I believe that the answer lies in the concept of "collective guilt" as well as the psychology of shame, as they affected the geopolitical realities discussed above.

Wilder worked in the U.S Army's PWD. The PWD role in the de-Nazification program at that time was to attempt to arouse in the German populace an awareness of and a sense of guilt for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. This was controversial (and remains so to this day). Were the Germans "collectively guilty" for the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes?

The notion that the entire German people was collectively to blame was apparently first put forward by some Allied opinion makers prior to the end of the war to justify forcing severe terms of surrender on Germany and harsh treatment of it after the war.[20] Among the tactics used to convince the German people that they bore responsibility for the crimes against humanity committed by the regime so many of them had supported was the distribution of posters showing pictures of some of these atrocities with the message in large, bold print: "Diese Schandtaten: Eure Schuld!" ("These atrocities: your fault!").[21]

[20] This point is made in "De-Nazification." One of the plans being considered was the Morgenthau Plan.

[21] Ibid.

Wilder's film was part of this campaign, quoting the head of the PWD, to "shake and humiliate the Germans and prove to them beyond any possible challenge that these crimes against humanity were committed and that the German people—and not just the Nazis and SS—bore responsibility."[22] The strategy here was (and is) common: induce guilt by public shaming. The relationship between "shame" and "guilt" is a matter of much theoretical discussion, especially in psychology.[23] For this article, I adopt the following analysis.

First, a person p feels guilty about x when x is something that p did or does, but p holds that x is immoral. Note that, on this view, a person can feel guilty about something that he knows that no one else knows about. For example, if I anonymously lie to the police, tipping them off falsely that my neighbor (whom I dislike) is a drug dealer, and my neighbor subsequently is killed when the police raid his home, I would feel guilty, even though I might be sure nobody else knew what I did.

By contrast, person p feels ashamed of x when x is something p did (or does), p believes that (at least some) other people know about x, and that (at least some) other people regard x as bad. Note that by my usage here, in the case above (where I falsely inform the police that my neighbor is a drug dealer), I might feel guilty, but I wouldn't feel ashamed, since other people wouldn't know what I did. Note also that by my usage, I could well feel ashamed about something without feeling guilty. For example, a person might be publically discovered making racist remarks, not feel guilty about it because he is in fact a profound racist, but feel ashamed because he knows most people in his society consider racism evil and are judging him accordingly.

Finally, note that by my usage, feeling ashamed is broader than feeling guilty. I might feel ashamed of my poor speaking ability, in that I realize that other people notice that I cannot speak grammatically and articulately and judge me to be ignorant (hence lacking intellectual virtue). However, I wouldn't feel guilty, because having poor speaking ability is not immoral.

I will use the phrase "to shame" as follows. A person or group g shames a person or group p when g informs third parties about something that g believes p has done that g believes the public views as

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[22] Ibid.

[23] See, e.g., "Guilt and Shame," *Therapists.com*, accessed online at: http://www.therapists.com/fundamentals/guilt-shame.

immoral. By my usage, when people shame a person, that person will feel ashamed (and perhaps also feel guilty), but only if he is guilty, that is, did (or does) what he is accused of doing. By contrast, if that person is innocent, that is, did not do what he is accused of doing, the shamed person or group will almost surely feel indignation or anger.

One last psychological point needs to be made. The shaming of a person, whether innocent or guilty, will likely make that person resentful. This is because shaming is a form punishment. As Jennifer Jacquet so well puts it, "Shaming, which is separate from feeling ashamed, is a form of punishment, and like all punishment, it is used to enforce norms. Human punishment involves depriving a transgressor of life, liberty, bodily safety, resources, or reputation (or some combination), and reputation is the asset that shaming attacks."[24] She goes on to note that these deprivations can be "active," in that something is taken from the punished (his life, liberty, or property), or "passive," as when something is withheld (affection, love, or even attention). For example, she notes that a recent survey of Americans shows that two-thirds of them admit to using the "silent treatment" to punish others.[25] People resent being punished, even when they are guilty, and even more so when they are innocent. This is true of shaming no less than any other form of punishment. Jacquet explains, "Shame can lead to increased stress and withdrawal from society. Shame can hurt so badly that it is physically hard on the heart."[26] Shaming, especially severe shaming, thus can lead to resentment.

Shaming has two different effects. It can lead to acceptance of guilt and a desire to make amends and improve behavior. However, it can lead to resentment and withdrawal, or even aggressive attack. Jacquet cites a 2009 study showing that of patients who felt shamed by their doctors for being overweight, about half felt grateful (and many subsequently tried to lose weight). However, nearly half subsequently "avoided or lied to" their doctors.[27]

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[24] Jennifer Jacquet, "How Shame Can Save the World," *The Chronicle Review*, February 27, 2015, p. B16.

[25] Jacquet adds that shaming, while it can be accompanied by violence, is usually done nonviolently. It is then one of the "intricate nonviolent punishments" people have devised in our evolution; ibid., p. B15.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

With these insights, I think we can plausibly explain why the U.S. Army used Wilder's documentary only very briefly. As the National Center for Jewish Film notes, his film is one of the few that pushes the notion of the "collective guilt" of the German people.[28] The theory of collective guilt was controversial even when it was introduced toward the end of the war by some Allied elites. The Army knew, despite the fact that some people believed in the doctrine of collective guilt, that most people—Allied citizens as well as Germans—rejected it.

This is reasonable, because the doctrine is untenable on its face. After all, many Germans surely either never supported the Nazi Party, supported it only under duress, supported some elements of its ideology (such as the need for societal order and stability) while rejecting its intense anti-Semitism, or accepted its anti-Semitism without wanting to see the extermination of European Jewry.[29] So even if we think that some (or perhaps most) Germans were anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi enough to support mass murder, surely not all were. Collective guilt, though, means that every German shares blame, without exception, for every atrocity committed by the regime. In fact, and ironically, the look of shock, horror, and sorrow on the faces of some of the Germans required to tour the death camps shown in the film itself belies the film's own message.

Guilt is not a moral property of people as groups, but only truly applies to individuals for their personal actions. Yes, a nation can be held liable for the actions of its government, in the sense that *its government* may be forced to pay reparations to another government, say, or pay fines to an international trade association. However, that does not mean each person of that nation is somehow guilty, and therefore must personally pay or face incarceration. In short, collective guilt is a metaphysical muddle that commits a logical fallacy, namely, the "fallacy of division."

Thus, shaming those Germans who either did not know of or did not support the mass killing of Jews and other targeted groups would only result in their feeling intense indignation and anger toward the Allied occupation forces. While many—perhaps even most—

[28] "Death Mills."

[29] Indeed, it was only around 1941 that the Nazi regime seems to have decided to exterminate the Jews. As late as 1939, Eichmann himself favored shipping them all to the island of Madagascar.

Germans surely did feel intense anti-Semitism (enough in many cases to support or even participate in the Holocaust), shaming them—even rightly—would result in many simply withdrawing from or even opposing the Allied forces. The geopolitical needs to rehabilitate Germany and to stave off Soviet imperial designs led to the rapid end of the PWD's planned campaign of shaming the Germans generally.

6. Holocaust or Shoah?

Another question is raised by the documentaries discussed above. While the Wilder, Stevens, and Resnais documentaries do not refer to the Holocaust as being focused on the Jewish People, the film *Genocide: 1941-1945* from the series *The World at War* does. In addition to all of the other qualities that make it an outstanding film, *Genocide* focuses on the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people in particular. In fact, of all of these documentaries, it is the only one to talk about Nazi race theory and its role in the unprecedented genocide of the Jews. I think this focus is appropriate, but since there is some controversy here, some explanation is in order.

The term "Holocaust" is used ambiguously.[30] Some use it to refer to all of the mass murders committed by the Nazis in the concentration camps and by the Einsatzgruppen, which over the dozen years the concentration camp system operated before the fall of the regime, killed about 11 million people. Besides the nearly 6 million Jews murdered, there were 5 million others: Soviet POWs (2-3 million), ethnic Poles (1.8-2 million), the mentally and physically disabled (270,000), the Roma (90,000-220,000), Freemasons (80,000-200,000), Slovenes (20,000-25,000), Homosexuals (5,000-15,000), Spanish Republicans (7,000), and Jehovah's Witnesses (2,500-5,000).[31] Other people use the term to refer only to the extermination of the Jews specifically.

So the controversy is this. While 6 million Jews were murdered, so were (roughly) 5 million other people. In putting the focus on Jewish suffering, don't we risk ignoring the horrible suffering of the other 5 million? However, if we talk about all of the murders taken together, don't we risk trivializing the horrible burden borne by the Jewish people? Was not their suffering unique?

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[30] "The Holocaust."

[31] Ibid.

There is no easy answer to this dilemma. The answer I favor is this. The Nazis used the camps and killing squads to target several groups for a number of reasons. They targeted the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, because they wouldn't fight for the regime. The Nazis mass murdered the Soviet POWs because the regime considered the Bolsheviks their major ideological foes, and (I suspect) out of fury over their losses in the war against Russia. The disabled were targeted because of the Nazi eugenicist ideology. The Jews, along with the Roma and Slavs, were targeted because of Nazi racial theory. The Freemasons were targeted for allegedly being cat's-paws of the Jews by pushing tolerance of them.[32]

The Nazi crimes against the Jews were indeed unique, in several ways. First, unlike the other groups, the plan to annihilate European Jewry grew directly out of the virulent anti-Semitism which was an essential component of Nazi ideology at the outset. Nazi identification of the Aryan race is done in explicit contrast with the Jews.[33] For example, while in *Mein Kampf* Hitler makes no reference to the Roma, he makes numerous anti-Semitic remarks.[34]

Second, virtually none of the Jews imprisoned and killed ever fought for any army. While many Soviet POWs were starved and gassed, they had fought: moreover, the Soviets—especially by the end of the war—held many German POWs. For example, nearly 100,000 Germans surrendered when the Nazis lost the battle of Stalingrad. As one writer puts it:

> The war in Russia had brutalized those who fought there—on both sides. The common standards of decency even in war all but disappeared . . . . German POWs were seen as the people who had destroyed vast areas in western Russia and killed millions. Therefore, those who had been captured were used to rebuild

[32] Hitler makes his view of Freemasonry quite clear early on; see Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), p. 315.

[33] Ibid., p. 300.

[34] Ibid., see, e.g., pp. 50-65, 119-21, 300-316, 319-20, 622-24, and 637-40.

> what they had damaged. If they died in doing so, then they died.[35]

Of the 3 million Germans taken prisoner by the Soviets, the Soviet records show that nearly 400,000 died, but later West German estimates run to about 1.1 million. Most German POWs were released by 1950, but some were held as long as 1956.[36]

Third, and most importantly, the sheer percentage of the targeted population killed was by far the greatest among the Jews. That is, the murders of the Soviet POWs, captive Poles, Roma, and others in each case did not come close to being a complete genocide of the groups targeted. However, something like 67% of the Jewish population in Nazi-occupied Europe were killed in a five-year period.[37] This was and is unprecedented in all of human history.

A balanced definition of the term "Holocaust" would therefore be: "The nearly total genocide of European Jewry, along with the targeted mass murders of other groups, by the Nazis who imprisoned them." When referring specifically to the decimation of the Jewish people, I prefer to use the word Shoah. Shoah, which means calamity or destruction, has become the standard Hebrew word used to refer to the Holocaust.

7. Conclusion

I have reviewed four Holocaust documentary films, all of great power and effectiveness. All saw widespread viewing, with the exception of the Wilder film. I attributed this fact to its dubious and provocative thesis—the notion of collective German guilt. Let me conclude by pointing out some of the tools the filmmakers of these documentaries utilized to achieve the power these films have.

The most important tool these documentary filmmakers exploited was the use of actual footage of the liberation of the camps and what was discovered therein, which often included the Nazis' own

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[35] See "German Prisoners of War," *History Learning Site*, accessed online at: http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/german_prisoners_of_war.htm.

[36] "German Prisoners of War in the Soviet Union," accessed online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_prisoners_of_war_in_the _Soviet_Union.

[37] "The Holocaust."

film of what they were doing. As De Swann argues in his recent book on the nature of genocides,[38] mass killings have occurred throughout history, but we have photographic images of almost none of them, much less moving pictures of them. Thanks to the film crews of the American and Soviet Armies, we have extensive archival footage of the death camps. This allows the documentary filmmakers to exploit the nature of film as a unique visual medium to have an impact on the audience. The sight of one box full of gold-filled teeth is more powerful than dozens of pages of the description of the utilization of concentration camp victims' bodies.

Another important tool utilized, especially by the BBC film, is the use of later testimony of participants in the event. An SS officer being interrogated by officers of the army who just liberated the camp has only a limited grasp of the scale, evolution, and effects of the Holocaust. Listening to an ex-SS officer discuss the events he participated in decades afterward allows us to hear his retrospective understanding (or lack thereof) of what he did and why he did it.

Another tool is the use of subtle cinematographic tone and brilliant narrator dialogue to enhance the power of the imagery. This tool is most skillfully deployed by Resnais.

Finally, narrative focus is an effective tool. By "narrative focus" I mean simply the selection of specific aspects of the historical event or other phenomena used as the broad subject of a documentary. Both the Stevens and the BBC films stand out in this regard. Stevens's documentary focuses on showing *that* there had been a genocide, as well as the vast extent of it (the massive network of camps, numbers of victims, and depth of the atrocities committed). Stevens was doing exactly what Eisenhower hoped he would: proving—*documenting*—to the American public that, unlike the anti-German propaganda in World War I, these incredible reports were true. In contrast, the BBC documentary puts the focus on explaining the Shoah, the systematic total war against the Jews specifically, based upon a virulent racial form of anti-Semitism.

[38] Abram De Swann, *The Killing Compartments: The Mentality of Mass Murderers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).