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Did Hollywood studios help Hitler?

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Posted: 12:00 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2013

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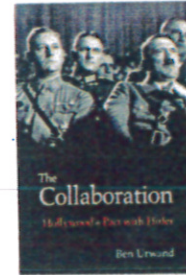
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By [Bo Emerson](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Hitler was fascinated with Hollywood, sometimes watching two films a day, and as the Third Reich rose to power during the 1930s, Hollywood did what it could to keep the Fuehrer pleased and German audiences entertained.

New scholarship shows just how far the studios were willing to bend to keep their films circulating in the Fatherland. American moviemakers agreed to cut scenes from movies, scuttled entire projects and removed Jews from roles in front of and behind the camera.



Ben Urwand's new book, "The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler," describes how American film studios accommodated Naziism during the 1930s. The true history of the era is dismal, but is it as dismal as portrayed by Ben Urwand? A member of the Harvard Society of Fellows and author of "The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler," Urwand, will speak Wednesday, Nov. 13, at the Marcus Jewish Community Center during the Center's annual book festival.

Urwand suggests that not only were the U.S. studios self-censoring, but they responded to requests from the German consul in Los Angeles, Georg Gyssling, who had the power to deny access to the German market, nixing those that were critical of the Third Reich.

The book has triggered rebuttals from the New Yorker magazine's film critic David Denby and has prompted a relative of film mogul Louis B. Mayer to call for Urwand's Atlanta appearance to be canceled.

Hollywood's willingness to compromise with the Third Reich is the topic of "The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler."

Part of the reaction against "The Collaboration" is due to Urwand's title. "When I hear words like 'collaboration' and 'pact,' steam starts coming out of my ears," said Thomas Doherty, author of "Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939," which examines the same time period.

"The word 'collaboration' is a trigger word," Doherty added. "You use that to describe the Vichy government and Quisling in Norway; that's the word you use to describe people who are actively collaborating with the Nazis and helping the Nazis deport Jews to Auschwitz."

Urwand replies that the terms appeared often in communication between the studios and Gyssling, and that some of the actions of the American studios actually did aid the German war effort.

Chief among such actions were the studios' decisions to send crews to Germany to film Nazi rallies and military parades, producing images that were used in German propaganda films to glorify the Third Reich.

Yes, the studios colluded with propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, but it was the only way for them to film inside Germany, said Doherty. That film was re-edited in the U.S. with American voice-overs as a way to raise the alarm about the Nazi war machine, he added.

But Urwand said the American versions don't excuse the fact that the studios participated in the propaganda effort, and that "in Germany those newsreels were used to mobilize support for Adolph Hitler."

It is a contentious subject, made more so by the fact that most of the Hollywood studios were run by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who should have been doing their utmost to fight Nazism.

Doherty insists that through such organizations as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, "Hollywood did more to alert Americans to what Naziism was than any other industry in America."

Urwand will appear at the Marcus Center in dialogue with Matthew Bernstein, professor and chair of film and media studies at Emory University. Bernstein said the idea of canceling the event is "absurd," and said he welcomed a chance to host a discussion in which scholarly research is the focus. "This is an opportunity - unusual, rare, almost non-existent - to have a conversation about historical research methods and interpretation."

Alicia Mayer, who, like Urwand is a native of Australia, has written that Urwand's book constitutes a slanderous attack on her great-uncle, film mogul Louis B. Mayer.

But Urwand said those sympathies are misplaced. "What we need to do here is remember who the real victims are," he said. "The victims are not the studio executives. The studio executives were doing excellent business, leading fine lives and doing deals with the Nazis. The victims are the 6 million Jews who perished in Europe."

Ben Urwand will discuss "The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler," 7:30-9:30 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 13, at the Marcus Jewish Community Center, Zaban Park, 5342 Tilly Mill Road, Dunwoody. Tickets: \$18; members: \$13. Information: 678-812-4005; [www.atlantajcc.org/](#)