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Audrey M. Hehman

Bellarmino University, hehmanau@gmail.com

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Movies, Memory, and Millennials: How Modern Films Have Influenced the Holocaust
Discussion

Audrey Hehman

Bellarmino University Honors Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Fedja Buric

Part I: There's No Business Like Shoah Business

“It’s a truism... that we never directly encounter events, only *representations* of events, which offer different *versions* of events. The more highly charged the event, the more evocative it is, the greater the incentive to become invested in different versions of it.”¹ This is true of any historic event, but quite possibly the best event to fit this description is the Holocaust of the Jews in Europe. Those of us who did not endure the concentration camps have no way to know exactly how it felt to be in that situation. Elie Wiesel said this while criticizing the acclaimed mini-series *Holocaust*.² We only know what we have seen in the representation of the event, so we have seen different versions of the Shoah³. Each year we see a huge increase in Holocaust films being released, with no signs of slowing down.

In this thesis I plan to focus on the fundamental films that affect how we view the Holocaust today. I will be looking specifically at how these films affect the millennial’s perspective: in today’s world when a young student learns about the Holocaust, their primary instinct is to look for movies, TV shows, and search for information on the internet. We have approximately 100,000 survivors alive to give personal testimony.⁴ So now, more so than ever, it is important for historians and students alike to look at how the Holocaust is represented. For example, many schools will watch *Schindler’s List* to show students what the Shoah was like,

¹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 220-221.

² Paraphrased from the documentary *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*, dir. Daniel Anker, perf. Gene Hackman (USA: Anker Productions, 2007), DVD.

³ Shoah is another term used for the Holocaust. While Holocaust means a sacrifice that burns the entire offering, Shoah means a catastrophe. While there is debate on the usage of each term, this thesis will use both indiscriminately.

⁴ In addition to only 100,000 survivors, the youngest of these average an age of 71. So the survivors who are able to give full testimony, remember the events, and can communicate are much less than 100,000. Figure taken from a Time article, <http://time.com/4392413/elie-wiesel-holocaust-survivors-remaining/>

rather than try to grasp the concept through reading primary sources. There have been instances where students are not mature enough to handle watching the film, and were known to laugh and mock the film.⁵

In a digital age, where Netflix, Wikipedia, and unchecked facts and articles are everywhere, it is important more so than ever to analyze what our media is telling us. As a history major who grew up in this media and movie saturated culture, I feel like this puts me in a unique position to talk about the Holocaust discussion in a post-*Schindler's List* world. I know my first introduction to the Holocaust was books like *Night*, and movies like *The Pianist* and *Life is Beautiful*. All were stories focusing on the survivors. In fact, it wasn't until I was much older that I saw movies that did not have the Hollywood happy ending that is typical of Holocaust films.

My experience with Holocaust education and films is certainly not irregular. This is why I will be looking at Holocaust media, from postwar to modern day, with an emphasis on the pivotal decade of the 1990s. In this thesis I hope to further bring to light the importance of the Holocaust discussion, especially when Holocaust media is not scrutinized by many who watch it. Many people take Holocaust movies as fact, and because there are so many of them and they are so accessible, it warps what we perceive the Shoah to have been. Either that, or we become so desensitized to what they show us, it no longer holds significance. The Holocaust becomes fiction, like the movies show us. Our sense of what was real and what is fiction gets blurred in Holocaust films, and the overabundance of Holocaust media does not help this.

⁵ "Teens' Laughter Angers 'Schindler's List' Viewers," Tribunedigital-chicagotribune, January 25, 1994, accessed April 02, 2017, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-01-25/features/9401250307_1_holocaust-laughing-angers.

This is not to say, however, that Holocaust media does not have any benefits, or that we should stop making Holocaust films completely. These films can explore themes that would otherwise not be talked about, such as the 2008 film *God on Trial*, which takes a philosophical approach to try to answer some of the questions raised by the Shoah. However, from the historical perspective, Holocaust films can pose threats to the historical memory of the Shoah. How then, can we draw distinctions in the Holocaust discussion? To see the full benefits and harms of this vast library of Holocaust films, we will analyze the themes, storylines, objectives, and historical accuracies of numerous Holocaust films. Only after this analysis we will be able to draw a conclusion about how Holocaust films impact what we know.

For this thesis, I have also conducted interviews with Generation Y (aka millennials) to see firsthand what their thoughts and reactions are to Holocaust media, and how much the films have an impact on millennials. I found that many millennials have seen at least one Holocaust film, and that almost all interviewees saw the Shoah as a very removed subject, something that does not affect them today. I also found that many were not as informed about Holocaust films as I had anticipated: many couldn't name more than a handful of films, and a few thought that all Holocaust films were factual.

Schindler's List, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Inglourious Bastards*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Sophie's Choice*, *The Pianist*, *The Book Thief*, *X-Men*: these are just a brief sampling of movies that represent Jewish persecution during the Third Reich. Since the 1970s, our culture has been saturated with illusions to and storylines revolving around the Holocaust. One can't even read comic books like *X-Men* or *Superman* without running into a reference to the Holocaust. There is even a subgenre of the graphic novel, pioneered by Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, that focuses on telling the events of the Shoah through full-fledged graphic novels. It

seems that almost every form of media we consume, whether it be books, newspapers, movies, documentaries, or comics talk about the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is an event that fascinates historians, theologians, and lay people. As historian Yaffa Eliach said, “there is no business like *Shoah* Business”.⁶ It seems that the Holocaust is now appropriate for any age. For example, while I was visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC, there was a little girl in a stroller at the museum, whose mom had ever so thoughtfully given her one of the infamous ID cards, even though the girl could not yet read. Especially in America, there are so many Holocaust memorials, museums, and exhibits that it has become commonplace. Author Tim Cole said, “it seemed that the ‘Holocaust’ had become as American as apple pie.”⁷

Ever since the rise of the Nazi regime, the media has had a unique relationship with representing events that involved Nazi actions. Even in the 1940s there were movies that addressed the events of the Shoah – even though now we’d consider the comments made wildly inappropriate. Some films tried to downplay the Final Solution. The film *I Married a Nazi* (1940) has a line: “I bet they [the concentration camps] aren’t has as bad as they say they are!”⁸ Other movies went for comedy, as a scene in the 1942 film *To Be or Not to Be* shows a woman in an elegant ball-gown who gets scolded: “is that what you’re wearing to the concentration camp?” These are just two examples of film portrayal of the Holocaust during the Second World

⁶ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: from Auschwitz to Schindler: how history is bought, packaged, and sold* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6

⁷ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 14

⁸ For a great overview of film’s unique relationship with Nazism and the Holocaust, see the documentary *Imaginary Witness*

War. Films in the late 1930s and early 1940s began dealing with more social issues. Despite this, there were only a few films that openly confronted Nazism and anti-Semitism: *The House of Rothschild*, *The Great Dictator*, and *Gentleman's Agreement*, along with the two previously mentioned ones, stand out.⁹ Especially after America came into the war, films focused on the war and uniting against fascism. So anti-Semitism and the genocide which had begun were not focused on in film, rather the war effort took center stage.¹⁰

Already we can see a complex relationship between the media representations of the Holocaust and the actual Holocaust. This only got more complicated as the trial of Adolf Eichmann began in 1961. Eichmann was an SS official in charge of deporting European Jewry.¹¹ He was “an ambitious bureaucrat...[he] began to organize transports of Jews to the General Government...Eichmann played a central role organizing forced emigration of Austrian Jews in 1938 and of Czech Jews a year later.”¹² He had escaped United States custody and had been hiding in Argentina until he was again discovered by the Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence community:

The background to this announcement was a secret Mossad campaign which would only really come to light fifteen years later as the agents involved started to speak out... This news led to months of diplomatic wrangling between Argentina and Israel starting with the request that the Israeli ambassador issue a statement explaining the run of events.¹³

⁹ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002) 16.

¹⁰ Ibid, 44.

¹¹ "Adolf Eichmann," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, , accessed April 02, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007412>.

¹² Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: a Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016).108.

¹³ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 49.

Eichmann is most commonly known for creating the schedules for the trains that deported Jews to camps. Eichmann was also one of the senior officers at the Wannsee Conference which “focused on Jews as the top priority of Nazi destruction. Eichmann’s report makes it clear that all 11 million Jews in Europe were targeted for murder.”¹⁴

The Eichmann trial was the most widely covered trial since Nuremburg. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw rise in television sales, so more people were able to view the trial. There was much controversy at the beginning of the trial, because the Jews wanted to try Eichmann in Israel. Many Americans felt that Israel had no right to claim jurisdiction over the case, and said that the Argentine authorities would be better to try him.¹⁵ One of the most notable things about the Eichmann trial was how much later it was than the Nuremburg trials. This gap in time allowed for a renewed interest in the Holocaust. Many newspapers reported on the trial as well. The Eichmann trial is also famous for bringing forth testimonies made by survivors. This was the first significant time that a large group of survivors came forth and told of the horrors they experienced. Again, this furthered the Holocaust discussion, and was one of the very first times anybody had heard survivor testimonies of what the camps were like¹⁶.

After the release of the movie *Judgement at Nuremburg* in December 1961 there was the first significant wave of Holocaust films released, including *The Pawnbroker* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*.¹⁶ *The Pawnbroker* centered on a survivor and his life after moving to America, and the survivor’s guilt he experienced. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was yet another version adapting the famous diary – this time as a TV movie. Another fascinating film (though it was never

¹⁴ Bergen, *War and Genocide* 164.

¹⁵ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 129 ¹⁶ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust* 60.

¹⁶ *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*. 2004

released) is *The Day the Clown Cried*, about a German circus clown who is put in a concentration camp and performs for Jewish kids. The star of the film, Jerry Lewis, said it was the worst film he had made, and the movie was buried. Only in the summer of 2016 was footage finally leaked. The Library of Congress has a copy of the film, but only on the promise that they won't release it publicly until June 2024.¹⁷ In this first wave we see films that focus on the Holocaust from a more outside perspective – only *The Day the Clown Cried* focused on the Holocaust happening in the camps. However, *The Day the Clown Cried* never made it to final cuts, for fear that it would be poorly received.

In the late 1970s, NBC released a miniseries entitled *Holocaust*, which Peter Novick says is, “without doubt the most important moment in the entry of the Holocaust into general American consciousness.”¹⁸ NBC originally created *Holocaust* as a response to the successful miniseries *Roots*, produced by ABC that was about slavery in the Antebellum south. *Holocaust* went through major phases leading up to the Holocaust, so people became familiar with events such as *Kristallnacht*. However, *Holocaust* also caused a lot of controversy. Famed author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was very outspoken about the series, saying it was “untrue, offensive, cheap” and “an insult to those who perished and to those who survived.... It transforms an ontological event into soap-opera.”¹⁹ Despite this and many other protests against it, *Holocaust* brought the events into the mainstream and into everyday conversation in America. Lawrence Barn, a professor of Modern Jewish History and founder of the Western Jewish Studies association says that the series reached an estimated 120 million Americans. Those who

¹⁷ Mahita Gajanan, "Thirty Minutes of Jerry Lewis's "The Day The Clown Cried" Released Online," HWD, June 18, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/06/watch-jerry-lewis-the-day-theclown-cried>.

¹⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 209.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 211.

tuned into the program would have otherwise remained uninformed about the history of the Holocaust, while a poll indicated that 60 percent respondents felt watching *Holocaust* enabled them to better understand Hitler's treatment of the Jews."²⁰

After *Holocaust*, the public only became more fascinated with these tragic events. Films such as *Sophie's Choice* used the Holocaust to further character development, and mislabeled as "Holocaust Films" because of one character's backstory. During this time the Holocaust film genre grew into what it is today: "a film influenced by the Holocaust is also termed a Holocaust film."²¹ The 1980s also saw two remakes of previous Holocaust films: *To Be or Not to Be* (Starring Mel Brooks) and another TV movie of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Here we see the growth in interest in Holocaust films, encapsulated in the 1985 documentary *Shoah*. This nineand-a-half-hour film, along with the remade films from the 1940s, illustrate how the Holocaust was solidifying itself in Hollywood.

While the 1980s focused on remakes of old Holocaust films, the 1990s included some of the most pivotal Holocaust works to date. The most famous was *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg. Spielberg's film has been one of the most praised, as well as one of the most criticized, Holocaust works.²² The choice to film the movie in black and white is a topic that has been the focus of discussions among many groups. The little girl who walks around the ghetto in a red coat is possibly the most memorable scene in the entire movie. Because of the substantial conversation surrounding *Schindler's List*, I will save the discussion, praises, and criticism for

²⁰ Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: the Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) 54.

²¹ Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 7.

²² For more on the criticism surrounding *Schindler's List* see Yosefa Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997).

later consideration. Despite how groundbreaking and revolutionary *Schindler's List* is claimed to be, *Schindler's List* is still a Hollywood movie with a “happy ending” with a group of survivors who now have over 6,000 descendants²³.

Besides fictional Holocaust movies, there are several Holocaust documentaries that are fundamental to the Holocaust discussion. One of the earliest Holocaust documentaries was *Night and Fog*. This film hardly mentions Jews, and talks about them in conjunction with the other victims of Nazism. This was a trend in the 1950s, where focus on Jewish victims was not the norm. In the 1985 documentary *Shoah*, we see a shift in who is represented in Holocaust documentaries. This documentary is considered one of the best documentaries ever made, and the most influential Holocaust documentary in existence.²⁴ Claude Lanzmann, the documentary's director, made it more of a visual oral history, and did not use any archival footage. He only took videos of the camps today, and videos of his interviewees. He avoided recreations in his film, and wanted to let the interviews be the focus. “This was his principal method on Shoah: to incarnate the truth of what happened through survivors' testimonies, even at the cost of reopening old wounds.”²⁵ This is in stark contrast to Holocaust films, which are completely recreated events. Today one can find documentaries that focus even more so on Holocaust victims. Smithsonian documentaries such as *The Seven Dwarves of Auschwitz* and *Treblinka: Hitler's Killing Machine* on Netflix, focus on specific groups or places when discussing the Holocaust.

²³ *Schindler's List*, dir. Steven Spielberg, perf. Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes (USA: Universal Pictures, 1993).

²⁴ The film ranks #2 on best documentaries lists from the British Film Institute (2014), as well as publishers such as Thrillist and Paste Magazine.

²⁵ Stuart Jeffries, "Claude Lanzmann on Why Holocaust Documentary Shoah Still Matters," *The Guardian*, June 09, 2011, accessed April 02, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jun/09/claude-lanzmann-shoah-holocaustdocumentary>.

These media representations from the 1990s and onwards are considered some of the most essential Holocaust works, and millennials are the most familiar with them. Today, millennials are familiar with the Holocaust through recent films, and can even see the Holocaust in films like *X-Men*. Moreover, the Holocaust is present in media outside of films: videos and commentaries on websites including Facebook and Instagram are ways that the Holocaust is being discussed by millennials. Holocaust education is changing as quickly as technology changes, and millennials will soon be the ones to carry the stories and lessons learned from the Holocaust to future generations.

Part II: Americanizing the Holocaust through Film

Early Holocaust films had a much more positive lining to the tragic events of the Holocaust. They approached the Holocaust by looking at life outside the camps, and in 1972 *The Day the Clown Cried* brought Holocaust films into the camps. This film was also one of the earliest attempts at a comedy that revolved around the Holocaust. At the time this was not acceptable, and the film became a flop. However, there were many films after *The Day the Clown Cried* that utilized these methods and were successful. The example set by *The Day the Clown Cried* then begs the question: what has changed since 1972 to make this film more acceptable today? To attempt to answer this question, we must look at the development of Holocaust films from the end of World War II up through Schindler's List. There were very few Holocaust films in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The most notable film from this time is the actual camp footage that was shown to American troops, and later used as evidence in the Nuremberg Trials.

One of the very first Holocaust films that was released was *Singing in the Dark*, released in 1956. The story follows a man named Leo who has amnesia and does not remember being victimized by the Nazis.²⁶ He becomes a nightclub singer, and while visiting a psychiatrist, begins remembering what happened to him. The National Center for Jewish Film said:

This important and little known film is one of the first American features to dramatize the Holocaust and only the second to depict a Holocaust survivor (called “refugee” as the film predates the use of the term “survivor”) as the main protagonist. The film represents an early attempt to integrate the Holocaust into mainstream popular culture using American movie conventions of the period.²⁷

The film’s importance does not go much further. The movie ends with Leo getting his memory back and ends with him singing in a bombed-out synagogue in Berlin. When the film was released in 1956, the New York Times Review called it light “socko,” meaning it was a very effective and profound film.²⁸ A modern critic said it was “high Holocaust kitsch.”²⁹

In the late 1950s, the first *Diary of Anne Frank* film was released after the success of the stage play. *Anne Frank* shows the beginning interest in adapting Holocaust testimonies into films. This film was adapted from the screenplay, which was adapted from *Diary of a Young Girl*. So the first film version of Anne Frank’s diary was already twice removed from the diary itself. The film ends optimistically, despite the grim fate of the characters, with the line, “In spite

²⁶ *Singing in the Dark*. Directed by Max Nosseck. Performed by Moyshe Oysher. United States of America: A.N.O Productions, 1956.

²⁷ “Singing in the Dark,” National Center for Jewish Film, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.jewishfilm.org/Catalogue/films/singinginthedark.htm>.

²⁸ “Light ‘Socko’; ‘Singing in the Dark’ at Three Theatres,” New York Times, March 8, 1956, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E0CE6DE113FE333A0575BC0A9659C946792D6CF.946792D6CF>.

²⁹ “Singing in the Dark,” National Center for Jewish Film.

of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” While Anne did write this line, it is in a section of the diary that is not nearly as optimistic as this implies. Like *Singing in the Dark*, *The Diary of Anne Frank* focuses on individuals who were affected by the Final Solution. Both films are a product of their times, and end in a happy way. Notably, neither of these films focus on events inside concentration camps, but on what was happening outside of them, or after the war. We will see how this contrasts films like *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and later films.

There is a subtle shift in focus for Holocaust films in the 1960s after the Adolf Eichmann trial, as evident in the film *The Pawnbroker*. This movie, released in 1964, was based on a book of the same title. The movie switches between the present story and flashes of what the survivor remembers from the camps, and what triggers his memories. The movie, “is a shattering excess of mental torment and deep self-pity this man must endure, and it shifts him to a level of awareness that lets him see his present life in previous terms.... [it] brilliantly intercut flashes of the horrors of the concentration camps with equally shocking visualizations of imprisonment in a free society.”³⁰ *The Pawnbroker*, like *Singing in the Dark*, has a deep focus on survivors in the modern world who are coping with the tragedies they endured. However, *Pawnbroker* opts for a darker cynicism than any previous films, and does not make light of any of the events that happened to survivors of the Holocaust.

In the 1960s and 1970s audiences tended to want less comedy and more substance. An unusual case that illustrates this was the 1972 film *The Day the Clown Cried*, which attempted to bring comedy back to the Holocaust. Comedian Jerry Lewis made this film about a circus clown who, because of his drunken comments about Adolf Hitler, is sent to a concentration camp. In

³⁰ Bosley Crowther, “Movie Review - - THE PAWNBROKER,” The New York Times, February 26, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=EE05E7DF1739E773BC4951DFB266838E679EDE>.

the camp, he begins performing for Jewish children, trying to lighten their moods and giving them hope. The film ends with Helmut, the clown, leading the children to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. “When he realizes that they won’t be merely imprisoned there but exterminated, he sacrifices himself to allay their fears and leads them into the gas chamber.”³¹ The film, while made in its entirety, was never shown, and Jerry Lewis had it buried, vowing to not show the film. The script is available online to read, but it was not until 2013 that any footage was released. Even then, only 30 minutes are available to watch. Jerry Lewis said he was ashamed to have made the movie, and that it was “bad, bad, bad.”³²

The unsuccessful film may have been ahead of its time, which could give credence as to why it was such an infamous failure. After all, *The Day the Clown Cried* is not so far from the vastly popular film *Life is Beautiful*. They are both Holocaust films that use humor to contrast the emotion of the film. They both tell “the story of a saintly jester who shields the children around him from thinking the unthinkable. And the real kitsch value of that scenario is that it threatens to do the same thing to the adults watching the movie: to shield them from reality.”³³ One reason that *The Day the Clown Cried* failed and *Life is Beautiful* succeeded is the time periods in which each were made. The former was made in 1972, before Holocaust films really took off, and the latter was released 25 years later in 1997 in the post-*Schindler’s List* industry.

During the 1970s, Holocaust media was not as prevalent in society, so humor about the Holocaust was not accepted as much as it is today. Film critic Owen Gleiberman says

There’s an element of blasphemy that might once have defined the movie and no longer seems to. “The Day the Clown Cried” has the chutzpah to turn the Holocaust into a fable,

³¹ Richard Brody, “A Glimpse of ‘The Day the Clown Cried,’” Culture, *The New Yorker* (New York: The New Yorker), August 13, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/a-glimpse-of-the-day-the-clown-cried>.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Jerry Lewis’ ‘The Day the Clown Cried’: Outrageously Awful...Or Ahead of Its Time?,” *Variety*, June 19, 2016, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://variety.com/2016/film/columns/the-day-the-clown-cried-jerry-lewis1201798751/>.

a storybook curio, a weeper of lost innocence. And that doesn't come off as nearly such a violation now, because there have been so many movies since then, from "The Reader" to "Shining Through" to "Jacob the Liar" to "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas," that have used the horrors of the Holocaust as a middlebrow movie backdrop. The truth is that the Holocaust has become a genre, and there's one movie more than any other that helped to make it that. It's the real "The Day the Clown Cried."³⁴

He makes the argument that *The Day the Clown Cried* is not as blasphemous as it was originally called, but that it was ahead of its time. The film is currently held by the Library of Congress, under agreement that the film will not be released until June 2024.

One of the films that has changed the Holocaust discussion significantly was the TV miniseries *Holocaust*. This series was released by NBC in four parts in April 1978 and starred Meryl Streep. It was "by far the most elaborate single presentation of the Holocaust made for American television," at the time of its broadcast.³⁵ The series ran for a total of nine and a half hours, and gained close to 100 million viewers in its initial run.³⁷

Holocaust was aired again in America in subsequent years, and it was also broadcasted in many other countries, most notably Israel and Germany. Immediately after its release, criticisms about it began. Elie Wiesel spoke out about it in an article called "Trivializing the Holocaust" and says that the series treats the Holocaust as if it were just another event, and that it doesn't show that the Holocaust is unique.³⁶ Jeffrey Schandler, a professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University says that Holocaust television is inheritably flawed because the medium is frivolous and superficial by nature, and so it trivializes the enormity and gravity of the subject.³⁷ *Holocaust*

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (n.p.: Oxford University Press, 1999). ³⁷ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000) p. 209.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 211.

³⁷ Jeffrey Schandler, *While America Watches*, p. 168

began a discussion that had not previously existed, asking not if Holocaust films can be made successfully, but if they *should* be made at all.

The 1980s saw more Holocaust films released, the most famous of them being *Sophie's Choice*, based on the book by the same name, and starred Meryl Streep once more. The film is classified as a Holocaust film, but the main plot of the film is not Shoah related. Rather, the film uses the Holocaust as a plot device to show the tortured life that Sophie has had to endure. This is not unlike *The Pawnbroker*, but the similarities between these films stops there. *Sophie's Choice* is a movie where the Holocaust takes the backseat to the main plotline, a love story.

Talking about the book, author Jerzy R. Krzyzanowski said that, "The impressions are being created in the mind of the average reader, someone who would pick up a paperback copy of the novel at a corner drug store and would most probably believe every scene and every word printed on its pages."³⁸ Films are, especially today, so widely available that this statement holds true for the film version of *Sophie's Choice* as well. In fact, I would argue that films are more widely watched than books, as many people would choose to watch a 2½ hour film than read a book. With *Sophie's Choice*, we see Holocaust film becoming even more lax in their treatment of the subject matter, as the film switches between sexy scenes and then attempts to flash back and seriously discuss the events of the Holocaust. Towards the end of the movie you find out that Sophie's choice was deciding which child of hers would live and which would die. The few scenes that are supposed to take place in Auschwitz take information from Holocaust survivors

³⁸ Jerzy R. Krzyzanowski. "What's Wrong with Sophie's Choice?" *Polish American Studies* 40, no. 1 (1983): 64-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20148119>.

into account. So while the scenes try their best to be historically accurate, the film falls flat because of the secondary role the Holocaust takes.

The final notable film in the 1990s is the popular film *Life is Beautiful*. This Italian film by Roberto Benigni mixes humor and tragedy, as *The Day the Clown Cried* had previously tried to do. This film, however, was sent to final cuts, was released, and became a vastly popular film: it was nominated for seven Academy Awards, and won four. One theory for the success of the movie is “the human response to sentimental optimism, so much a part of this film.”³⁹ This is a theme that has only continued in Holocaust films and media. For example, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s final portion of the permanent exhibit is dedicated to the liberation of the camps, and to the survivors, to not end on a note of despair. The main issue with this in *Life is Beautiful*, however, is that it blatantly disregards historical accuracy. “This film purposefully failed to ever mention that children under three feet high were sent to the gas chambers upon arrival at the camps,”⁴⁰ so Guido’s son, historically speaking, would not have survived the film to “take the tank home.”⁴¹ After re-watching the film ending, the music is cheesy, with too much pomp and celebration for what the survivors have experienced. The movie’s ending seems almost grotesque and has a naïve approach, almost implying that Holocaust was okay because this one child and his mother survived, and realized their lives were still beautiful. Ilona Klein, a professor of Italian at Brigham Young University said, “In the film, Benigni is concerned about one example of survival, an incredible exception to the rule of annihilation, and disregards the historical implications of millions of other deaths.”

³⁹ Ilona Klein. "'Life Is Beautiful, Or Is It?' Asked Jakob the Liar." *Rocky Mountain Review* 64, no. 1 (2010): 1731. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25677053>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Vincenzo Cerami and Roberto Benigni, *Life Is Beautiful*, directed by Roberto Benigni, (Italy, 1997).

By examining prominent Holocaust films from the 1950s through early 1990s, we can see how much Holocaust films have changed. Throughout the years, Holocaust films have focused on individuals, a trend that doesn't seem to be changing any time soon. However, the way that the films focus on individuals has changed. In early Holocaust films we see the focus on survivors living their lives after the Holocaust while trying to come to terms with it. In later films, the focus shifts to individuals within the camps, during the Holocaust. This leads then to a shift in historical representation. Films began being less concerned with the accuracies of camp life, and began focusing on individuals to teach lessons or illustrate a specific point, sacrificing the historical realities for other purposes.

These films are not the type of films that millennials are watching. Out of 11 interviews conducted, only one mentioned a film that was before *Schindler's List*. This also means that only one interview mentioned a film that was released before they were born, as the group who was interviewed was born between 1990- 1995. Four mentioned *Life is Beautiful*, which was released in 1997. With the exception of films from the 1990s, millennials are, for the most part, not watching early Holocaust films. With only one exception, none of the films mentioned by millennials in interviews were from before the 1990s, the time they were born.

The film that encapsulates this shift the best is the most well known and most popular Holocaust film to date – *Schindler's List*. Spielberg's popular film solidified a place for the Shoah in cinema, and challenged what Holocaust films could and couldn't do. *Schindler's List* is simultaneously the most praised and most criticized Holocaust film, and changed Holocaust film permanently.

Part III: “Whoever Saves One Life, Saves the World Entire”

While there are countless moving and thought provoking Holocaust films in existence, there is one that stands above all others. *Schindler’s List*, directed by the Jewish-American filmmaker Steven Spielberg, is one of the most important and influential Holocaust films. It is one of the most contested, most acclaimed, and highly debated Holocaust works in existence.⁴² Just as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is the quintessential Holocaust graphic novel, *Schindler’s List* has become the quintessential Holocaust film. It is the most talked about film, and is discussed as if it is not a work of fiction. Perhaps it is because it is arguably the most accessible Holocaust work

⁴² See Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust* and the collected works in Yosefa Loshitzky’s *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*.

– with clear “good guys” and “bad guys.” At three hours, it is not as taxing to watch as Lanzmann’s nine-hour documentary, and it does not shy away from portraying concentration camp life as other films may. *Schindler’s List* has grown to become the most important Holocaust film: it prided itself on being accurate. Journalist Barbie Zelizer notes that “discussions about the film were filled with references to ‘the real’ and ‘the accurate.’ The film was lavishly praised for portraying the Holocaust in what was widely agreed to be an accurate fashion...this insistence on historical accuracy was foregrounded by both the film’s makers and critics.”⁴³ This also means it has to be held to a higher standard than other films. It introduced the Holocaust into mainstream film industry. Because of this the Holocaust has become commonplace in media, and we have become desensitized to it.

The film is popular, because it is accessible, but not simplistic, and it is one of the most accurate fictional films about the Holocaust. This does not mean that the film is without flaws, and it still oversimplifies what happened. Teachers show *Schindler’s List* in high school to portray the life in ghettos and concentration camps. It is more appealing to students than documentaries, as *Schindler’s List* is a sensational, gritty, and captivating story. In contrast, documentaries are passed off as stuffy, old, and boring.

As those who have grown up in a post 9/11 world, we have grown used to seeing images of horrors, especially when they are readily available to look up on the internet. When *Schindler’s List* first came to theaters, it was a spectacle to see the horrors of bodies being burned, the terror of the ghetto liquidation, and children being killed. *Schindler’s List* does not

⁴³ Barbie Zelizer, "Every Once in a While," in Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on *Schindler's List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 22.

shy away from showing horrors of the camps, showing point blank executions, the raw fear of those hiding in the ghettos, and the pain of children being taken away from their parents.

When Steven Spielberg undertook to make this film, many were skeptical. He wanted to produce the movie, but did not want to direct it. He took up the project to get in touch with his own Jewish roots. Up to this point, Spielberg's resume included films such as *Jaws*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Hook*, and *Jurassic Park*. Many were skeptical of this director, whose only "serious" work at this point was *The Color Purple*. How could this director of fantastical action movies do justice to a topic as serious as the Holocaust?⁴⁴ Despite the worries, Spielberg began filming in March 1993. *Schindler's List* attempted to have the same feeling as a documentary, and most of the filming was done by handheld cameras.

The film's main purpose was to tell the story of Oskar Schindler. "Spy, businessman, bon vivant, Nazi Party member, Righteous Gentile. This was Oskar Schindler, the controversial man who saved eleven hundred Jews during the Holocaust."⁴⁵ As the movie portrays him, Schindler was a spy for the Nazi Party until 1939, and was a renowned businessman. He bought a factory, and began employing Jews in his factory. He continually bribed Nazi officers, most notably commandant of the Krakow-Plaszow camp, Aemon Goeth, to keep Jews in his employment, saving them from certain death. He moved his factory farther away from the camp, saving even more people. By the end of the war a list of about 1,100 names had been compiled as those saved because of Schindler's actions.

⁴⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "Every Once in a While," in Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 23.

⁴⁵ David M. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story Behind The List* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2004).

Creating a Hollywood film around him solidified in our minds a fictional Oskar Schindler, not the real Oskar Schindler. Liliane Weissberg, a professor of German language and literature, said that the film portrayed Schindler as “Well dressed and compassionate, Spielberg’s hero is an antiskinhead who, at the same time, works against the system... In short, Spielberg’s Schindler became a ‘typical American hero,’ an ‘action man.’ But was this true for the ‘real Schindler as well?’”⁴⁶ Emile Schindler, Oskar’s wife, gained fame after the film. However, she claimed that it was she who did the hard work of saving the Schindler Jews, and called Oskar an alcoholic, and an asshole.⁴⁷ Author David Crowe said that “In reality, Oskar Schindler had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of his famous transport list. He admitted as much to Dr. Stanley Robbin after the war. Dr. Robbin...was one of those *Schindlerjuden* [Schindler Jews] taken directly from Emalia [*sic.*] during the first week of August 1944.”⁴⁸ This claim is just one of the many discrepancies between the film and real accounts of Oskar Schindler. As all films do, *Schindler’s List* has to synthesize information for clarity and length. For example, all the accountants who were working under Oskar Schindler were condensed into one character.

Despite these discrepancies, *Schindler’s List* remains the most discussed and revered film about the Holocaust in existence. Part of the reason *Schindler’s List* is the most influential Holocaust film is because of how many people the film has reached. *Schindler’s List* has grossed over \$96 million since its opening: to give this perspective *Life is Beautiful* grossed \$57 million, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* grossed \$9 million. *Shoah* grossed a mere

⁴⁶ Liliane Weissberg, “The Tale of a Good German,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 178-181.

⁴⁷ David M. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story Behind The List* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2004), 604- 607.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 361.

\$20,175.⁴⁹ In terms of these numbers, we can see how much more popular and influential *Schindler's List* is than other Holocaust films. The film was lauded for being Spielberg's best directing of his career, and movie of the year in 1993.⁵⁰ It won seven Academy Awards, and was "soul-inspiring", "monumental", and "a masterpiece", to quote a few reviews. *Schindler's List* was the most influential Holocaust film since NBC's *Holocaust*, and has reached more people than any other Holocaust movie has. While *Holocaust* brought the Shoah into mainstream discussion, *Schindler's List* secured the Holocaust's place in Hollywood.

This is only furthered by the choice to film in black and white, which is one of the most talked about aspects of *Schindler's List*. There are only a handful of scenes that are in color. The most memorable usage of color is when Oskar Schindler watches the ghetto being liquidated. In the black and white film, you see a young girl in a red coat wandering around the ghetto. Later in the film you see the little girl's body and her red coat being taken away on a wheelbarrow to be burned. The film resumes color at the end of the film when it shows the *Schindlerjuden* walking in Jerusalem in modern day. Spielberg has said that he chose to do the film in black and white, as he had no color reference for the time period.⁵¹ However, many people have criticized this choice, saying the lack of color makes the experience less realistic. Yosefa Loshitzky notes "Black-and-white cinematography today has more the aura of 'artsy' glamor than a claim to formal authenticity. Contemporary codes of realism require color as the norm, while black-andwhite is seen as a nostalgic, stylized, and artificial reference."⁵² This criticism stems from the

⁴⁹ Numbers taken from "Internet Movie Database." IMDb. Accessed February 02, 2017. <http://www.imdb.com/>.

⁵⁰ Barbie Zelizer, "Every Once in a While," in Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Yosefa Loshitzky, "Holocaust Others: Spielberg's *Schindler's List* versus Lanzmann's *Shoah*," in Spielberg's Holocaust: *Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 109.

⁵² Ibid.

argument that those who experienced this event did not experience it in black and white, and that the lack of color dulls the reality of the events that are shown. For Millennials, this is especially true. We associate black and white with “old” and “romantic” films, not gritty and graphic films.

One critic, Michael Bernstein, says that “*Schindler’s List* is not just an ambitious but flawed movie; it is a work that manipulates the emotions raised by the enormity of its historical theme in order to disguise the simplistic melodrama of its actual realization.”⁵³ This is reminiscent of Elie Wiesel’s comments saying *Holocaust* was making a “soap-opera” of the events that happened. So we see that even with such an influential work, there are still critics who argue against representation of the Holocaust through Hollywoodized movies. Bernstein further goes on to say that *Schindler’s List* simplifies morality, and that there is no hint of a gray zone or the “agonizing choices... that Jews were compelled by their tormentors to confront moment by moment.”⁵⁴ This is one of the main problems with using *Schindler’s List* as an authoritative Holocaust source. Like a movie adaptation oversimplifies a well written novel, so too do Holocaust films oversimplify the complexities of Hitler’s Final Solution. Bernstein goes on to say that people gloss over criticism of *Schindler’s List* because people are so reluctant to be critical of anything that talks about suffering on the scale of the Holocaust.

Part of the appeal of *Schindler’s List* is the simplification of it. There are clear-cut good guys and bad guys, victims and perpetrators. The hope is that this Hollywood film will make people interested in a topic that they otherwise wouldn’t have interest in. Bernstein suggests that

⁵³ Bernstein, Michael Andre. "MOVIES: The "Schindler's List" Effect." *The American Scholar* 63, no. 3 (1994): 429-32. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.bellarmino.edu/stable/41212268>

⁵⁴ Bernstein, p. 430.

the people who will read Primo Levi or watch *Shoah* are not the same people who will watch *Schindler's List*. This may stem from the fact that *Schindler's List* is meant for everyone, as Spielberg said himself.⁵⁵ Spielberg's film seems accessible to younger audiences, such as high schoolers who watch the film in class. However, there have been instances where teenagers who watch *Schindler's List* have burst out in laughter during execution scenes. The students later apologized and said they "were shocked and didn't know how to react."⁵⁶

One of the most striking moments in the film comes at the end, as Oskar Schindler is leaving the camp, and he has to say goodbye to all the people he has saved. The scene ends with Schindler looking at his car, at his cufflinks, and crying, saying he could have saved more. Throughout the film we see Schindler as a businessman, as tactical, and still not entirely as a savior. In this moment Schindler's character is solidified as a selfless man, redeemed from all the bad he has done throughout the film. So too has the real Oskar Schindler been redeemed in history, from all the bad he did in real life. The liberation of the Schindler Jews comes at the same time Oskar Schindler is liberated from his status as a German who worked with Nazis. Spielberg said that he wanted the film to feel like a documentary about Oskar Schindler, and employs numerous documentary style shots into his film, channeling Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*. *Schindler's List* is meant to tell a story that actually happened, yet purposefully changes and manipulates events to fit a Hollywood storyline, wrapped up neatly in three hours.

⁵⁵ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 85.

⁵⁶ "Teens' Laughter Angers 'Schindler's List' Viewers," *Tribunedigital-chicagotribune*, January 25, 1994, , accessed April 02, 2017, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-01-25/features/9401250307_1_holocaust-laughing-angers.

The most important thing *Schindler's List* did was not redeem Oskar Schindler or introduce the Holocaust to students, but that it brought the Holocaust into Hollywood mainstream, and thus fully into mainstream culture. However, it was not only Spielberg's film that brought the Holocaust into the mainstream, but also on the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. These two events coupled together solidified the Holocaust a place in American culture.

One of the main reasons Spielberg decided to film *Schindler's List* was to stifle the growing Holocaust denial movement. Despite this good intention, the media saturation that *Schindler's List* poses a problem. Creating so many films about the Holocaust normalizes it, the exact opposite of what these films and Holocaust researchers are trying to do. Certainly this is an unintentional result of *Schindler's List*, but it nonetheless happened. After the release of *Schindler's List* and the opening of the USHMM the Holocaust was everywhere. Spielberg created the Shoah Foundation, where all the money he made from the film went to. This furthered oral histories from survivors, and continued to make the Holocaust a more recorded event. The advent of the internet in the 1990s has played a huge role in the telling of the Holocaust. However, this leads into dangerous territory, as fact checking has become less common. The dangers of how common the Holocaust has become on the internet is evident when using Google, where the second autofill option is "Holocaust jokes". Overusing and overrepresentation of the event leads to it not being taken seriously, and could ultimately lead down the dangerous road of anti-Semitic thoughts that began the Shoah in the first place.

Part IV: Fact Over Fiction

In discussing the films that influence the Holocaust, we must also look at documentaries. These films are the more accurate counterparts to Hollywood films, and yet they are vastly overlooked by millennials. We will look at two of the most respected documentaries in film, *Night and Fog* and *Shoah*. Another important aspect of this discussion will be documentaries from less reputable companies, such as Smithsonian documentaries. Most documentaries that are

readily available to Millennials fall into the dangerous categories of shockumentary or pseudodocumentary. These flashy and less factual documentaries have gained more credence in recent years. As with Holocaust movies, we will analyze these films, and why the less factual documentaries are the more popular ones.

The first documentary to examine is Claude Lanzmann's epic *Shoah*, which was released in 1985. This documentary was made over the course of 11 years, and the final product was a lengthy nine and a half hours.⁵⁷ It is one of the most insightful and comprehensive looks at the Holocaust ever attempted. The documentary does not follow one camp, one person, or one storyline. It has no recreated events, or pictures from the Shoah. Lanzmann has commented that it is meant to be a visual oral history. His documentary is said to be one of the best documentaries in the world, ranking #2 on the British Film Institute's 2014 list of best documentaries. The film focuses on four main topics, including two death camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka), the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Chelmno extermination camp. Lanzmann's documentary is wide-ranging: he interviews survivors, Nazi officers, train conductors, and bystanders. It shows the locations of camps, and interviews with survivors, and eyewitnesses. The documentary uses various languages, and is not overdubbed with an English translation. Rather, the documentary is subtitled, and the viewer can then focus on the inflection of the speaker's voice, even if one doesn't understand the language that is being spoken.

Shoah is one of the most praised documentaries in existence, and yet, it has not gained popularity among millennials.⁶⁰ Why is this the case? In part, it is because the film is so long, and that it is text heavy. Because most of the interviews were not in English and involved a

⁵⁷ Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*. (2002) p. 199.

translator, it not only lengthens the time of each interview, but the viewer also has to read the subtitles to understand what is going on. It has also been scrutinized for Lanzmann's unethical interviewing. Lanzmann holds nothing back in his interviews, asking blatant questions, such as "do you miss the Jews," to townspeople, and not shying away from questions that cause emotional distress to survivors. At one point an interviewee is clearly upset, and asks to stop, but Lanzmann pushes him to continue telling his story, telling him he cannot stop. He also promised a former Nazi officer that he was not taping the interview, when he actually was.

The length of the documentary is the main deterrent for people. I watched the documentary over the span of four days, and watching/reading nine hours of film on the Holocaust takes up a lot of time. Another main deterrent is the emotional aspect. Taking four days to watch interviews with survivors and people who saw what was happening around them is a very emotional process. While *Shoah* has become the authority Holocaust documentary, I believe it is not one that can be watched to introduce themselves the topic. Students who have watched it have called it boring.⁵⁸ People are willing to watch videos about first-person experiences in the camps, but they must be short enough to keep the attention of millennials. This is evident by the popular video published by the "Humans of Judaism" Facebook group, which is one woman's account of her time in the camps. The video caps out at 5 minutes, and has been viewed over six million times, with over 100,000 shares. Like Lanzmann's film, it is a

⁵⁸ Walter C. Metz, "'Show Me the Shoah!': Generic Experience and Spectatorship in Popular Representations of the Holocaust," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008), doi:10.1353/sho.0.0304, 17.

simple interview, with no recreations or images overlaid on the conversation. It is the woman talking, and that is it. It was the page's most popular post in 2016.⁵⁹

The above example shows a clear interest in visual/oral history interviews on the Holocaust. However, *Shoah* is 108 times longer than this video. Documentaries like *Shoah* and *Night and Fog* do not draw as many people, even though they are the more comprehensive stories. The video from Facebook, while powerful and moving, is one example of kindness that happened between Jews in the camps, and does not address many of the horrors that happened during the Holocaust. There is then a fine line between getting a comprehensive view of the Holocaust that will not reach as many people, and a short video with a specific point that will reach a broader audience.

Night and Fog is a documentary that makes a compromise between the two choices. It was released in 1956, only ten years after the liberation of the camps. It focuses on Auschwitz and Majdanek, and does not recreate scenes that may have happened. Like *Shoah* it uses footage of the camps in the present day, but *Night and Fog* also takes footage that was taken at the camps during liberation. With a run time of 30 minutes, it is much more accessible and less daunting to watch than *Shoah*. By juxtaposing images of past and present, *Night and Fog* gives an overview of how the Holocaust developed, from the rise of Nazism to camp liberation. However, there is one glaring issue with *Night and Fog*. While *Night and Fog* talks about how people were victims of fascism, it does not expressly mention Jews as a victim of Nazi fascism. Six out of eleven million victims of the Holocaust were Jewish, and yet this film chose to be silent about them. This is due to the fact that *Night and Fog* was directed at the French occupation of Algeria, so it

⁵⁹ Humans of Judaism Facebook page, accessed January 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/HumansofJudaism/videos/1776030969291390/>.

had a more political purpose. *Shoah* on the other hand, focuses on Jews and their personal stories. Since its release, other documentaries have chosen to focus on the individual as well.

It seems that there will always be qualms with Holocaust films and documentaries- nobody can get it right. *Shoah* came under heat for Lanzmann's unethical practices – assuring former Nazi officers they were not being filmed while they were, and pushing people to talk about memories they clearly were not ready to discuss. *Night and Fog* received criticism in Israel for not mentioning Jews. So even two of the most respected documentaries in existence are not a perfect representation of the Holocaust.

There are many other documentaries that are vastly more problematic than these two great films. With the advent of services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, it is easier than ever to watch documentaries. This means that there are many more documentaries being created as well. Just looking at Netflix, one can find documentaries with flashy titles such as, *The Seven Dwarfs of Auschwitz*, *What Our Fathers Did: A Nazi Legacy*, and *Treblinka: Hitler's Killing Machine*. There are also countless other documentaries: *Genocide, Auschwitz: Blueprint for Genocide*, *Death Camp Treblinka*, and *Einstazgruppen: The Nazi Death Squads*.

Two of the most problematic of these that I have watched are *The Seven Dwarfs of Auschwitz* and *Treblinka: Hitler's Killing Machine*. These two thirty minute documentaries are produced by the Smithsonian's television channel. Both are presented as documentaries, but are more likely to be pseudo-documentaries. They highlight the most problematic issues that are presented with the overabundance of Holocaust documentaries.

Neither of these documentaries' primary purpose is to educate people about why or how the Holocaust happened. Much of Holocaust education revolves around prevention of similar events. These films chose to zoom in on details around victims of the Holocaust. *The Seven Dwarfs of Auschwitz* follows the famous actor Warwick Davis as he researches the Ovitz family. The family was comprised of seven little people who were popular singers and performers. They were eventually sent to Auschwitz because they were gypsies, and Josef Mengele performed experiments on them because of their size. While this documentary did introduce viewers to who the Ovitz's were and what they went through, the main purpose of it seems to be to draw parallels between Davis and the Ovitz family. This follows the theme of Holocaust media trying to relate what happened to people during the Holocaust to people in modern day who would not have fallen victim to the Final Solution. *Seven Dwarfs* was more of a documentary about Davis' personal journey on researching the Ovitz's. It did have footage from an interview with Perla Ovitz, the only family member who was alive in the 1990s. This is the one reconciliation that the film has. Otherwise it is a film that tries too hard to be original. The fundamental problem is not with it being factual, but that it tries to be too showy. Critic Gabriel Tate said "we have to endure a celebrity host and a hopelessly unsuitable narrative hook conflating fairytale and reality. As amiable as Davis is, his fame proves a distraction, and the middle-distance gazing and ham-fisted attempts at empathy occasionally excruciating."⁶⁰

Hitler's Killing Machine, which was also produced by the Smithsonian Channel, follows forensic archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls as she excavates portions of Treblinka. This documentary does not give any new profound information on Treblinka. Much like *Seven*

⁶⁰ Gabriel Tate, "Warwick Davis: the Seven Dwarfs of Auschwitz," Time Out London, March 15, 2013, accessed March 25, 2017, <https://www.timeout.com/london/tv-and-radio-guide/warwick-davis-the-seven-dwarfs-ofauschwitz>.

Dwarfs, Hitler's Killing Machine follows the personal journey of Colls, and the triumphs and pitfalls she endures while excavating at the site. If these are not pseudo-documentaries, then both of these documentaries could alternatively be classified by the more modern classification of “shockumentaries.” These are documentaries that are meant to shock, by exploring different stories that otherwise would not be shown.

There are vast differences between Holocaust documentaries and Holocaust movies. Firstly, documentaries are factual, while movies are based in fiction. While numerous movies are based on fact, they are not, in themselves fact. This is sometimes lost on millennials, as one interviewee said that he thought Holocaust movies were all true, saying “I always figured they were true stories, I hope I’m not wrong... I can’t imagine someone wanting to make up a story for that.”⁶⁴ The sensationalizing of Holocaust documentaries blurs the line between real and fake. However, all Holocaust media (movies and documentaries alike) have common themes. They try to convey the horrors that happened during the Holocaust and, especially with American films, they try to universalize the Holocaust to make it pertinent to everyone. As an extension of this, an attempt to universalize the Holocaust becomes Americanizing it.

The examples of documentaries that are listed above are just a small sliver of what unhelpful and mostly uninformative movies are available to watch on a single streaming platform such as Netflix. Thus, the inherent problem is not in quantity of documentaries that are

⁶⁴ Mike Dorsey, “Interview with Mike Dorsey,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁶⁴ David Sterritt, “Hollywood's Holocaust,” review of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Tikkun*, June 2009.

readily available, but in the quality of them. Because of the vast numbers of documentaries

created, directors want and need a new hook to get people interested in their documentaries. As time went on desensitization has led to these hooks being more and more outlandish. Rather than

letting survivor testimonies speak for themselves, as Lanzmann did, the smallest details are being scrutinized in documentaries.

Many of the good Holocaust documentaries available are passed off as stuffy and boring. Students tend to zone out during films shown in class, as they are presented in an academic manner. Out of twelve interviews conducted with millennials, one interviewee mentioned *Shoah*, and was the one of two interviews that mentioned Holocaust documentaries at all.⁶¹

Documentaries are not sensational enough to keep millennials interested. The reputable documentaries that tell the facts are not horrific enough. In an interview with Kristen Zellers, she said, “I get bored with documentaries...But if it’s like, *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, where it’s not actually really accurate, it’s kind of a commercialized version of it, maybe [I would watch want to watch it] about the same as any other movie.”⁶²

I think that millennials have inadvertently played a role in the sensationalizing of Holocaust documentaries. They were only in grade school and middle school when the terrorist attacks on September 11th happened. For some it is a vague memory, but almost all remember seeing the footage on their T.V.’s in the days following. College students today were no older than 9 or 10 years old when they witnessed these events. Because of mass media, this was one of the first times that young kids saw this type of violence on TV as it was happening. Thus, millennials grew up seeing horrors and death on their TVs, and Holocaust media was not as shocking to them. This in turn created a demand for more shock value, and leads to sensationalizing the Holocaust.

⁶¹ Louie Hehman, “Interview with Louie Hehman,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁶² Kristen Zeller, “Interview with Kristen Zellers,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

Many also began their Holocaust education at an early age. It is not uncommon for 12 and 13-year-old's to be introduced to the Holocaust. Carolyn Trier, a student at Bellarmine University, remembers hearing Holocaust and Jew jokes when she was in the fourth grade, and said she must have known about the Holocaust before then.⁶³ Many middle school students read *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *Night* to introduce them to the Holocaust. When you are this young and learning about the Shoah, it loses significance. In the next section we will explore how this happens, and what it means to the future of the Holocaust discussion.

Part V: Millennials and Modern Media

⁶³ Carolyn Trier. "Interview with Carolyn Trier." Interview by author. January 22, 2017.

Schindler's List opened the floodgates of Holocaust films, showing that the Holocaust does have a place in Hollywood. While this was not Spielberg's intention in creating the film, his bold choices showed that the general public is okay with a more sensational take on the Holocaust. This has inadvertently led to films like *Black Book* and *Inglourious Basterds*, which are glorified spy films that loosely have ties to the Holocaust. For example, *Inglourious Basterds* is a film by Quentin Tarantino that focuses on a Jewish woman named Shoshanna. This movie is classified as a Holocaust film loosely: Shoshanna and her family are in hiding at the beginning of the film, and are soon discovered. She watches her family get murdered when they are discovered, but she escapes. Her story is driven by her desire to get revenge, as the film culminates with her blowing up a movie theater that houses Hitler and numerous other Nazi officials. While the story is fictional in every sense and takes a very liberal approach to historical fiction, it is still categorized as a Holocaust film.

While conducting interviews with millennials, almost all had something to say about *Inglourious Basterds*. Out of 12 interviews conducted, five of them mentioned *Inglourious Basterds* when asked to talk about Holocaust films they are familiar with. However, there is a huge issue with this, as *Inglourious Basterds* is not factual in the slightest, and only talks about the Holocaust in broad terms. This film, as many Holocaust and World War II movies do, presented the Nazis as a quintessential bad guy. In *Inglourious Basterds* the Nazis are portrayed more as the bad guys in *Indiana Jones* than as legitimate fascist government that tried to take over Europe and killed eleven million people in the process. This is seen in *Inglourious Basterds*, and in an interview with Carolyn Trier, Carolyn said the movie was less about the Holocaust and more of "lets kill Nazis."

I have noticed across the interviews that almost all interviewees said that images they remember seeing were from textbooks or documentaries. Four of the interviews mentioned black and white images specifically. This is notable, because many millennials think of black and white images as old and un-relatable. So the fact that four interviews mentioned black and white images shows that students do not relate to the Holocaust, and they think of it as an obsolete and singular event that has happen in the past. They realize the Holocaust was a horrible event and don't want it to happen again, but it is presented as an event that is so far removed, and such a unique event that couldn't happen again, especially in their lives. This is furthered in films like *Inglourious Basterds*. The only millennial to recognize the issues that this mindset presents was Louie Hehman, who said:

By trying to dehumanize Nazis and make every single person who participated in what was happening the 1930s, we're trying to distance ourselves from it, and trying to say like, "oh this can never happen again", and I think it's dangerous to think that we are not capable of such evil, that society could never do it again and that was one unique timing issue. You don't have to look at Nazi Germany to find the ultimate pinnacle of human evil, it's popped up within every century in every country in different ways, it just so happens that the Holocaust just ended up being, in *my* mind, the culmination of it. And the question is do we learn from the mistakes of people from three generations ago, or do we say "oh we're better than them, and they were unique so we don't have anything we can learn anything from them."⁶⁴

The fact that millennials think the Holocaust is a singular, unique event that cannot happen again is confirmed in Matt Litzler's interview, who said, "I've always found the Holocaust interesting because it's such a radical mindset that people had."⁶⁵ So with *Inglourious Basterds* we see a new problem that has not been faced by other Holocaust films. Films are taking the Holocaust and using it in the most absurd fantastical way. As Daniel Mendelsohn of *Newsweek* commented,

⁶⁴ Louie Hehman, "Interview with Louie Hehman," telephone interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁶⁵ Matt Litzler, "Interview with Matt Litzler and Maggie Hehman," telephone interview by author, February 5, 2017.

“To indulge in [fantasies] at the expense of the truth of history would be the most Inglourious bastardization of all.”⁶⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman of Harvard University said, “ some theorists may see in the weakening of the factuality criterion a possible danger, arguing that any relaxation in the demand for historical accuracy risks undermining the reality of the Holocaust and thus provides ammunition for negationists.”⁶⁷ In an interview with Bellarmine student Kathleen Finan, she notes that Holocaust films, while they are mostly factual, have to go above and beyond with storylines and special effects to keep audiences interested, which is very evident in *Inglourious Basterds*.⁶⁸

Black Book is very similar to *Inglourious Basterds* insofar as it can loosely be categorized as a Holocaust film. I thought I had found an insightful and powerful story – a Jewish woman who is being persecuted becomes a spy for the Dutch Resistance, and helps uncover Nazi plans by becoming a secretary for a Nazi official. The story began as many historically based movies do: “Inspired by True Events.” I thought I would get a true story of one woman’s courage, only to find out that the story was made up, a figment of the director Paul Verhoeven’s imagination. The “true events” referenced the Dutch resistance against Nazism. While I expected a more profound and scholarly film, I got film that “relies on the same formula that has fueled Mr. Verhoeven’s big-studio career, namely frenzied sex and violence.” The film was “willfully irreverent” and “only works if you take it for the pulpiest of fiction, not a historical gloss, its stated claims to ‘true events’ notwithstanding. It also helps if you don’t worry about its

⁶⁶ Daniel Mendelsohn, “*Inglourious Basterds*: When Jews Attack,” *Newsweek*, 14 Aug. 2009.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Kathleen Finan, “Interview with Kathleen Finan,” Interw by author, February 5, 2017.

looseygoosey moral relativism.”⁶⁹ I never finished watching the film that incorrectly classified itself as a Holocaust film.

To use a less extreme example of this changing in accuracy, we can look at one of the most popular Holocaust films in the early 2000s, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. In fact, it was the most mentioned film in the interviews I conducted, as ten of the twelve interviews mentioned the film. One of the reasons for this is when the film was released, and how old these millennials were at this time. My realization was that *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is the millennial generation’s *Schindler’s List*. This group of millennials would have only been a few years old; some hadn’t been born when *Schindler’s List* came out in 1993. In contrast, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was released in 2008, has a PG-13 rating (unlike *Schindler’s List*, which is rated R), and was released when this group of millennials were between 13 and 18. Those who were 13 found *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* to be much more relatable than *Schindler’s List*.

The fact that millennials prefer *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* over *Schindler’s List* presents a problem, given that Holocaust scholars dismiss it for not being an historically accurate film, so it does not get the praise that other Holocaust films have gotten. The issue with millennials preferring *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not about one film’s lesson over the other, but that *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not accurate. Many have spoken out about it, saying that a boy as young as the main character, Schmuel, would not be in Auschwitz⁷⁰. Mike Dorsey watched *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and figured it was a true story, saying, “I generally think that’s true, because I can’t imagine someone wanting to make up a story for that,

⁶⁹ Manohla Dargis, "Bedding That Nice Nazi, and Other Wartime Perils," *The New York Times*, April 03, 2007, , accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/04/movies/04blac.html>.

⁷⁰ David Sterritt, "Hollywood's Holocaust," review of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Tikkun*, June 2009.

but I never really thought of that honestly.”⁷¹ *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was marketed by the Disney Company as a fable, but this doesn’t matter to film critic David Sterritt. He says, “the movie is sheer counterfactual fantasy, right down to Schmuel’s presence in the camp.” Even the producers of *Boy in the Striped Pajamas* agree on this fact, saying “children were generally taken straight from the transport into the gas chambers, and Schmuel’s story therefore requires a suspension of disbelief.”⁷² With *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, we see a microcosm for the issues surrounding Holocaust films: do we trade off historical accuracy for a more relatable story? This is a less extreme example than *Inglourious Basterds*. However, the main difference in these films is that *Inglourious Basterds* is obviously incorrect, while *Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not overt in its inaccuracies.

After *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, the story of Anne Frank was another common way millennials were introduced to the Holocaust. Many of them were first introduced to the Holocaust by reading excerpts from her diary, or seeing a stage adaptation of the diary. Anne Frank’s Diary is one of the most famous primary sources from the Holocaust, and has been translated into more than 55 languages, and sold over 24 million copies worldwide.⁷⁷ In 2010 yet another remake of Anne Frank’s story was made, this time as a TV miniseries. By watching the film adaptations of the diary, students empathize with a young girl around their same age, and can relate to her writings on her family, relationships, and growing up. This film, like *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, was released when these millennials were about the same age as Anne Frank was, and they can relate more easily to Anne than other survivors. Kathleen Finan said,

⁷¹ Mike Dorsey, “Interview with Mike Dorsey,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁷² Sterritt, “Hollywood’s Holocaust.”⁷⁷
 Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 23.

I feel like it made it... more personable to hear the story about someone who was, at the time, relatively my age when I first read about her. [It] kind of put the whole thing together, and I just thought it was a really personal account of what happened and how her life was so different than the life of normal people her age.⁷³

One of the most important aspects of teaching the Holocaust, according to history teacher Krystle Smith, is to get the kids to connect to the subject matter, and get them to relate to the subject. This is a theme throughout post-*Schindler's List* movies. Smith reiterated this saying, "if you show them more Hollywoodized movies, like *Schindler's List* or *The Boy in The Striped Pajamas* the kids feel bad – they sympathize for the people."⁷⁴ This was confirmed throughout my interviews, as I found that modern Holocaust movies have been one of the most vital and useful ways that students make this connection to those who went through the events of the Holocaust. One example came in Meranda Lile's interview, who said she would watch a Holocaust movie if "it told the story of a specific person, so I can attach a name to the actual events. Because it kind of makes it more real that way, rather than it being a vague sort of thing."⁷⁵ In Matt Litzler's interview he said "...*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, I remember seeing that in high school, and I had never really seen much imagery, I had just heard what happened, so it put images in your head, and made it more real."⁷⁶ Maggie Hehman said, "[Stories] focus in on one person, and it makes it more personable. It's not just this thing that happened to someone. Watching these movies, you see that people had lives and friends, and stuff before and after."⁷⁷ Jessi Tuemler had a similar sentiment, and said that you could see that

⁷³ Kathleen Finan, "Interview with Kathleen Finan," Interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁷⁴ Krystle Smith, "Interview with Krystle Smith" interview by author, January 6, 2017.

⁷⁵ Meranda Lile, "Interview with Meranda Lile," interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁷⁶ Matt Litzler, "Interview with Maggie Hehman and Matt Litzler," Interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁷⁷ Maggie Hehman "Interview with Maggie Hehman and Matt Litzler."

these were real people who were being victimized.⁷⁸ In eleven of the twelve interviews the phrases “more real” and “more personal” showed up, showing that Holocaust movies make millennials sympathize with the characters they are seeing on screen, despite historical accuracies or inaccuracies.

Insofar as the point of Holocaust films is to make viewers understand the emotions that happened during the Holocaust, films succeed. We see a trend away from accuracy in favor of allowing people to relate more to the characters that are being represented. For example, Molly Bee talked about watching the movie *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1999) in middle school. The film, which is based on a book by the same title, transports a modern Jewish girl back in time to the Holocaust, and follows her through her death in Auschwitz, after which she wakes up in the 21st century with a newfound respect for the Holocaust. While the story is not factual, its effect on its viewers is still profound. Bee said, “in that film there was a really intense scene in one of the gas chambers and I just never really pictured what being on the inside of one of those would be like, you know? I mean, you hear about the science of how they worked and stuff with the Zyklon B or whatever, but not so much the emotions and stuff that are in there.”⁷⁹

With modern Holocaust films, there is a common trend in millennials *not* wanting to watch Holocaust films. Carolyn Trier said in her interview, “I tend to not want to watch movies about the Holocaust, because I don’t want to watch things that make me sad, which is why I also don’t watch chick flicks, I would rather be entertained than have emotion.” Molly Bee had a similar sentiment when she said, “I know how movies about the Holocaust affect me on an emotional level and I’m sure they do most people but.... So I don’t – this sounds selfish – but I

⁷⁸ Jessi Tuemler, “Interview with Jessi Tuemler,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

⁷⁹ Molly Bee, “Interview with Molly Bee,” Interview by author, January 25, 2017.

kind of don't want them to ruin the rest of my night or day, or whatever."⁸⁰ This may be why movies such as *X-Men*, which mention the Holocaust but do not focus on it, are much more appealing to millennials than films that focus solely on the events of the Holocaust. I think that if *Holocaust* were released today, it would not have the huge success that it had in the past.

The saturation of the Holocaust in modern film and media results in an overabundance of revisionist Holocaust thinking. Holocaust jokes have become common, especially because of celebrities who have normalized these jokes. Joan Rivers once inappropriately commented, "The last time a German looked this hot was when they were pushing Jews into the ovens." After criticism, she responded, "My husband lost the majority of his family at Auschwitz, and I can assure you that I have always made it a point to remind people of the Holocaust through humor."⁸¹ She refused to apologize for her comments, and major news outlets perpetuated her comments.

This saturation and normalizing of Holocaust media has also lead to irreverence. Previously I mentioned my own experiences at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. Couples were hugging and kissing in front of a piece of the exhibit that explains how the mentally disabled were affected by the Holocaust. People were taking pictures of the exhibits, for what purposes, I had no idea. Journalist Philip Gourevitch called the Holocaust museum another "American theme park" and that the museum has a "peep-show format"⁸² and I felt that his comments had credence, as people seemed to be enjoying themselves too much.

⁸⁰ "Interview with Molly Bee."

⁸¹ "Joan Rivers not apologizing for Holocaust joke," CNN, March 01, 2013, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/28/showbiz/joan-rivers-holocaust-joke/index.html>.

⁸² Philip Gourevitch, "Behold Now Behemoth The Holocaust Memorial Museum: One more American theme park," Harper's Magazine, July 1993.

This theme of irreverence at memorials and museums is not only prevalent in America, but around the world. There is a website called “Yolocaust,” which is a series of photos that depict how people are no longer taking the Holocaust seriously. It takes photos that people have taken at the Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The website’s creator then takes these irreverent pictures and superimposes them on photos from the Holocaust. The first photo is captioned, “Jumping on dead Jews @ Holocaust Memorial,” and shows two guys jumping from one concrete slab to another. The author then imposes the two men jumping on a pile of bodies to show what exactly “Jumping on dead Jews” implies. The purpose of the project Yolocaust is to “explores our commemorative culture by combining selfies from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with footage from Nazi extermination camps... Many of them [the 10,000 daily visitors] take goofy pictures, jump, skate or bike on the 2,711 concrete slabs of the 19,00m² large structure.”⁸³ One picture showed a man juggling at the memorial, which leads one to wonder if *The Day the Clown Cried* would have succeeded in today’s world. The pictures were eventually removed, as each person had to email an apology to get their picture removed. The site now shows the emails of remorse, but both the original and superimposed images can be found using a Google image search.

The irreverence in real life towards the Holocaust may stem from the examples set by television, as irreverence towards the Holocaust abound in TV shows. *Seinfeld* has an episode about two characters who go on a date to see *Schindler’s List*, only to kiss throughout their viewing of the film. The popular FX show *Archer* is known for being irreverent in many ways, and has numerous references to places being like Auschwitz, but for trivial reasons, such as

⁸³ Shahak Shapira, "The Aftermath," YOLOCAUST, accessed January 18, 2017, <http://yolocaust.de/>.

someone making a margarita incorrectly at a spa, or a pet not having toys to play with (the character comments that it is like “Meowshwitz” in the room). These are examples of Holocaust jokes that do not further the Holocaust discussion, and belittles the experience of the eleven million killed during the Holocaust to a trivial event.

Millennials have the benefit of being able to go to Holocaust sites to further their Holocaust education, which is no longer restricted to just reading books or watching movies. Half of the interviewees for this project had been to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education in Cincinnati, or have been to concentration camps in Europe. Despite these trips to see up close the impact of the Holocaust, most of the millennials did not seem to have further interest in learning more about the Holocaust. Jessi Tuemler said she hears the same Holocaust stories over and over again, so she would only watch a documentary or movie if it had new perspectives.⁸⁴ Further, they do not seem to be utilizing these sources for educational purposes, but turn to other internet sources.

One of the greatest blessings, and indeed one of the biggest curses for millennials is growing up with the internet at their disposal. Eight of the interviews said their main sources for Holocaust research are Internet sources, i.e. Google, Wikipedia, and Facebook. Only one interview mentioned the USHMM’s website as a source they use to get information. The interview that mentioned the film *Shoah* said it was his main authority for Holocaust information, and was the only interview to specifically cite eyewitness accounts as their main source for Holocaust education. This shows a shift away from eyewitness testimonies, which first became prominent in 1961 with the Eichmann Trial.

⁸⁴ Jessi Tuemler, “Interview with Jessi Tuemler,” interview by author, February 5, 2017.

Part of the misunderstanding that comes with Holocaust education is that the topic is many times introduced not by history teachers, but by literature teachers. Out of the eleven interviews, five were introduced to the Holocaust by history teachers, five by English teachers, and one had the departments collaborate and learned about the Holocaust in both classes. Because of the different training that English and History teachers go through, English teachers are less concerned with historical accuracy, and more on text and applying the Holocaust experience to our own situations. They are not so concerned with the underlying causes, events, and historical ramifications of the Holocaust. They are not as focused on showing the warning signs of genocide, as history teachers may be. Louie Hehman, who has a B.A. in History from Bellarmine University encapsulated this idea that people don't understand the Holocaust by saying:

I don't think that people, as with the general state of history education in America, I don't think people really get the Holocaust. Like whenever I heard someone make a Holocaust joke in high school, I would get so mad at them, and like you don't have a right to do it, and I think the only way that you can think it's okay to do that is if you haven't seen the gas chambers, or you haven't met someone who has experienced the Holocaust, or really talked about what happened.⁸⁵

Students do not remember facts about the Holocaust because their Holocaust education begins so early. This is an issue that teachers face when introducing the Holocaust: How do you explain these horrors to students who are so young? Teachers introduce the Shoah to young, impressionable students, which can lead to a warped memory on the Shoah. Further, it makes students apathetic to the topic, as they think it is part of their boring history class that does not affect them today. Maggie Hehman said she remembered reading a book by "M. Night," in high

⁸⁵ Louie Hehman, "Interview with Louie Hehman," telephone interview by author, February 5, 2017.

school, meaning she had read the book *Night* by one of the most prominent Jewish philosophers of the 20th century, survivor Elie Wiesel. Because of this warping of memory, Maggie remembered the book *Night* as a book by M. Night, mixing Elie Wiesel with movie director M. Night Shyamalan.⁸⁶

Millennials who were interviewed knew that Holocaust films were not factual. Each of them were asked if they thought that most Holocaust films were truth or fictional. This question intentionally used the word “truth” rather than “factual”, and some interviewees picked up on this. They said that films could get to true feelings and emotion, while still not being entirely factual. Molly Bee said they were “fictional versions of true events,”⁸⁷ while Maggie Hehman said they were “fictional, and depicting real events.”⁸⁸

The growth in internet usage coupled with historically inaccurate movies shows a new trend in Holocaust education and Holocaust representation. Video clips catch short attention spans more than full length films, and platforms such as Netflix make almost any film accessible, accurate or not.

⁸⁶ Maggie Hehman “Interview with Maggie Hehman and Matt Litzler.”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Interview with Maggie Hehman.”

Part VI: Never Again

Holocaust films have come a long way since *Singing in the Dark* in 1956. General trends went from focusing on survivors and their experiences after their liberation, to focusing on events in the camps. Movies also began with a focus on Jews, but gradually began focusing on other groups, as was seen in *Schindler's List*. The Holocaust began to gain more discussion with the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, and was furthered by the movie *Holocaust*. In the 1990s Holocaust education grew by leaps and bounds, with the release of *Schindler's List*, the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., and growing Holocaust education in schools. After *Schindler's List*, films began taking even more liberties in their plots and interpretations of the events surrounding the Holocaust.

At the same time, documentaries were evolving. *Night and Fog* did not mention the Jews specifically as a victim of Nazi atrocities. *Shoah* was a landmark documentary that focused on testimonies of those who were alive during the Holocaust. Recent documentaries have included the voices of those who previously have not been mentioned, and short videos of testimonies are common on social media platforms such as Facebook.

The turn of the millennium brought new problems for Holocaust education and remembrance. No longer was the focus on *remembering* the Shoah, but on *how* to remember it. This is seen as films take more liberties in interpretations, creating fables out of the Holocaust,

and is exemplified in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. In the extreme case, this is seen in films like *Inglourious Basterds*, and *Black Book*.

Other factors that have influenced the modern Holocaust discussion include the changing demographic of those who discuss it. Less Holocaust survivors are able to give testimony, so the discussion is being carried on by those who have not experienced the event themselves. Since the new millennium, the internet has become the number one source of information, and electronic sources have become the norm.

Looking to the future, millennials will soon be the ones in charge of teaching and explaining the Shoah to a generation that will most likely not get the chance to meet survivors. In her interview, Jessi Tuemler said, “We’re seeing so many WWII veterans and survivors of the Holocaust starting to die, so I feel like for future generations it’ll be important to have documentaries, movies, and stuff like that, so they can learn.”⁸⁹ Thus, it is important to recognize how Holocaust films are affecting the narrative. Holocaust films are so polarized between movies and documentaries: it seems they are either boring or historically inaccurate, with very few films between. *Shoah* is authoritative, but I think it is too long to be an effective source for millennials to utilize, because they would consider it boring. *Inglourious Basterds* is not historically correct in the slightest, but entertaining to millennials. Thus Holocaust films looking forward should try to bridge the gap between these polar opposites. After this is done, it is possible for millennials to not only sympathize with victims, but also begin to fully understand the Holocaust and learn to recognize and combat modern anti-Semitism and Nazi ideology.

⁸⁹ “Interview with Jessi Tuemler”

As the opening line of this thesis said, “We never directly encounter events, only *representations* of events, which offer different *versions* of events.” Each of the films discussed shows that those of us who did not experience the Holocaust will never truly know what it was like to go through those horrific events, but how we try to do this changes with each generation. It is the charge of the millennial generation to discover their way of representing the Holocaust when it is their turn to teach the Holocaust. They can continue the trend of irreverence, of a society abounding in Holocaust jokes and mockery, or begin a new way of representation. The USHMM says that we will “Never Again,” let events like the Shoah happen again, and we can do this through Holocaust education. Millennials take up this charge, and the evolving Holocaust discussion becomes their responsibility, as they try to make “Never Again” a reality. This will only happen though if we recognize irreverence and inappropriate jokes when they happen.

No matter what directions Holocaust films take in the future, nobody is going to get it exactly right. There will never be a completely perfect or accurate Holocaust movie. This is not to say we can ignore the inaccuracies and pretend everything ended with the nice conclusions we are so used to in Hollywood. The Holocaust did not end with salvation for most its victims. For those that were saved, years of anger, sadness, and unanswered questions plagued them. History is not tied up in neat storylines and plots like movies. Elie Wiesel said at the opening of the Holocaust Museum in D.C. “we believe in the absolute necessity to communicate a tale. We know we cannot, we never will explain. My good friends it is not because I cannot explain that you won’t understand, it is because you won’t understand that I cannot explain.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Elie Wiesel, "ELIE WIESEL'S REMARKS AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONIES FOR THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, APRIL 22, 1993," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, , accessed April 02, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/research/ask-a-research-question/frequently-askedquestions/wiesel>.

The events of the Holocaust are never going to be fully explained, and they will never be fully understood. Films try their best to make sense of the Holocaust, and try to let us understand it as well. For this reason Holocaust films will continue to appear in Hollywood. In the same speech, Elie Wiesel said, “For the dead and the living, we must bear witness. For not only are we responsible for the memories of the dead, we are also responsible for what we are doing with those memories.” It is now the millennial’s responsibility to share these memories to future generations. For the dead and the living, millennials must bear witness.

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