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## 'Just Like Hitler': Comparisons To Nazism in American Culture

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'JUST LIKE HITLER'  
COMPARISONS TO NAZISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

A Dissertation Presented

by

BRIAN JOHNSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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English

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife Lynn and my children, Alexander and Theodore. They have been sources of both strength and relief.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the help and direction of Joseph T.

Skerrett, James Young, Barton Byg, and Robert Keefe.

ABSTRACT

'JUST LIKE HITLER'

COMPARISONS TO NAZISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

MAY 2010

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'Just Like Hitler' explores the manner in which Nazism is used within mass American culture to create ethical arguments. Specifically, it provides a history of Nazism's usage as a metaphor for evil. The work follows that metaphor's usage from its origin with dissemination of camp liberation imagery through its political usage as a way of describing the communist enemy in the Cold War, through its employment as a vehicle for criticism against America's domestic and foreign policies, through to its usage as a personal metaphor for evil.

Ultimately, the goal of the dissertation is to describe the ways in which the metaphor of Nazism has become ubiquitous in discussion of ethics within American culture at large and how that ubiquity has undermined definitions of evil and made them unavailable. Through overuse, Nazism has become a term too vague to describe anything, but necessary because all other definitions of evil are subject to contextualization and become diminished through explanation.

The work analyzes works of postwar literature but also draws in state sponsored propaganda as well as works of popular culture. Because of its concentration on Nazism as a ubiquitous definition of evil, it describes American culture through a survey of its more prominent, popular, and lauded works.

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## INTRODUCTION

### NAZISM AS AN EPITOME OF EVIL FOR AMERICAN ETHICS

Jackbooted, he descends the curtain garbed in the kind of military uniform the audience has since come to associate as traditional for a despot. Only moments earlier, promises of world domination and the god-like adoration of his people, offered by his minister of propaganda, Herr Garbitsch, literally drove him up the wall with anticipation and excitement. Now, he is alone with the object of his passion, an enormous shining globe, reminiscent of Atlas, exaggerated and bombastic much like the rest of the décor in Hynkel's office and the real office, designed for Hitler by Albert Speer, upon which it is based. The audience will soon learn that the globe is only a balloon.

The great dictator, Adenoid Hynkel, having come down from the curtain, first circles his globe like a predator upon a wounded animal, and then, with a kind of drunken passion in his expression, he lifts it up into the air, balances it on his fingers, and rolls it down his arm to flap in a slow languid acrobatic; a kind of familiarity that suggests the romantic, if not sexual, play of seducer and seduced, conqueror and conquered, sending the globe ever higher to silhouette against the signs of the double cross that hangs behind Hynkel's desk. Adenoid Hynkel, Charlie Chaplin's famous stand-in for Adolph Hitler, bats his eyes at the world, looks at the globe lovingly, and even purses his lips as if readying a kiss. He is dizzy with passion; stupefied by the promise of power.

The globe responds to Chaplin's movements by floating slowly and then bouncing high in the air even when sent there bounced off of Hynkel's rump as he lays face down on his desk in a pose reminiscent of a beefcake shot. The entire sequence is a ballet, the

score behind the action is appropriate to a love scene. Even Hynkel's last words to Garbitsch before this act with the globe suggest the sexuality implied in this play between dictator and free world: "Leave me. I want to be alone"—alone with his globe and his fantasies.

What is Hynkel in this scene? What is Chaplin's critique of Hitler such that this balloon sequence so sums up the problem with Hitler, Nazism, and maybe even fascism for his audience. Hynkel isn't particularly evil with his globe. He isn't violent or horrible. He's ridiculous. He desires to play with the globe the way one does with a lover. He flirts; he tickles; he directs it as a submissive. Years later, Susan Sontag comments on the various levels of submissiveness present in the crowds at the Nuremberg rallies, marking Hitler as their hypnotic and dominating lover in her essay "Fascinating Fascism" (1974): "Hitler regarded leadership as sexual mastery of the 'feminine' masses, as rape. (the expression of the crowds in *Triumph of the Will* is one of the ecstasy; the leader makes the crowd come.)" (*Under the Sign of Saturn* 102).

Chaplin has already seen and commented on the sexual character of Nazism in the late 1930s as an intercourse between leader and the led; between the ruler and the enslaved. He has turned it into the ridiculous interplay of domination between a man and the inanimate. He both reduces Hynkel's desires to a fetish-based sexuality and the crowd that would give up its humanity to become the inanimate fetish. The globe, the world, plays the ultimate submissive, it can do nothing to resist, until finally, in a single moment of assertion, it escapes Hynkel's grasp by popping. The Great Dictator, left only with the impotent and flaccid remains of the balloon, is reduced to tears.

Ultimately though, Hynkel is submissive, too, in Chaplin's depiction—he is submissive to the definition of Hitler that Chaplin brings out through his character. Hynkel of *The Great Dictator* isn't the Hitler of history. A postwar audience, armed with an awareness of the Holocaust, knows the difference implicitly. Hynkel may be a stand in for the tyrant, but, in the end, the resemblance between Hitler and Hynkel is simply cosmetic—a creation of satire that allows Chaplin to poke fun at the *Führer* and offer human, albeit silly, reasons for why Hitler acts the way he does. Hynkel is a conglomeration of the assumptions that Chaplin anticipates for his audience about Hitler turned funny. The film is successful precisely because it fits its contemporary audience's own desires so well. It is as if Chaplin said, "this is how Hitler acts; isn't it ridiculous," and the audience, finding its own fantasies represented in the film, agreed and began purchasing movie tickets in great abundance.

The question, then, isn't whether Hynkel is a historically accurate depiction of Hitler in *The Great Dictator*, but what the audience thought about Hitler such that Hynkel is a successful stand-in. Hynkel isn't particularly nasty, he's simply in love with the possibility of power. In humanizing him through the film, Chaplin invites the audience to deflate him like his balloon globe—to make him into a human being, where the superhuman aspirations of Hitler for world conquest seem ludicrous. It isn't even clear what he thinks he would do with this power. The title alone "*Aut Caesar aut nullus*," offered first by Garbitsch and repeated as Chaplin first approaches the globe seems to be the goal of the Phooey of Tomania (Chaplin's derivation of the title of *Führer* and the name of Germany). He simply wants to rule everything—how silly.

This romp with the ball, ridiculous as it is, is a continuation of a more serious scene in which Hynkel has received a report from Herring's agent B76 of an impending strike at the arms factory. She has had the strike leaders all rounded up and shot. Hynkel suggests that the 3,000 workers threatening to strike, be shot as well. He is urged against the mass execution by Garbitsch who cannot lose the workers or else risk "the rhythm of production." What this scene does, then, moving from the possibility of mass execution to its scathing critique on Hynkel's desire for world domination, is to emphasize the carelessness and removal of the tyrant and his inner circle from the concerns of everyday human beings.

Hynkel is so mesmerized by his own power in dealing with the strikers that he has become callous to the brutality that he is capable of ordering with only a word. As with the dance he performs after this encounter with agent B76, he is enamored with the moves he makes in his dance of power, but has lost cognizance of the repercussions. In like manner, Garbitsch has lost his connection with human concerns and cares only about people as a manufacturing resource. Hynkel's more jolly sidekick, Field Marshall Herring, is as vulnerable as his more sinister compatriots in the inner circle of the Double Cross (Chaplin's version of Nazism): just before B76 tells Hynkel about the strike, Herring enthusiastically reports, "We've just discovered the most wonderful, the most marvelous poisonous gas. It will kill everybody."

The dialogue with agent B76 roots the violence of Hynkel and his followers in a particularly economic setting. The people rounded up and shot are factory workers planning a strike. They are not Jews, gypsies, or homosexuals, but are rather, regular German folk who are threatening an act which is associated by its contemporary

American audience with Bolshevism and socialism. Those watching *The Great Dictator* at its premier would have seen union organizers and Marxists as both cut from the same cloth, and would have recognized the continuation in *The Great Dictator* of the pro-union themes Chaplin had portrayed in *Modern Times* when the tramp would accidentally find himself at the head of a union parade until attacked by union-busting cops.

The stance of *The Great Dictator* with its portrayal of Hitler as anti-union, though potentially controversial, would be subsumed by the more imminent controversy surrounding the film for its attempt to criticize Nazism and Hitler. *The Great Dictator* released just before the war, had to be produced by Charlie Chaplin independent of Hollywood's major film studios despite Chaplin's enormous successes at the box office. Because of the film industry's fear of losing the American market in Germany and Italy, and of offending supporters of fascism in America, Chaplin could find no backers for his film project. Despite his enormous celebrity, a film that criticized Hitler was too risky a business venture when the project began in 1938. The last and only anti-Hitler production backed by a major Hollywood studio is Warner Brothers' *Bosco's Picture Show*, premiering in 1933, which included only a 10 second animated newsreel-like segment in which a cartoon Jimmy Durante is chased, while on vacation in Prezel Germany, by an ax-wielding Hitler. In real newsreel coverage until late in the 1930s, Hitler and Nazi Germany were conspicuously missing. Even in speeches given by Roosevelt against fascism in the late 30s, he fails to mention Germany specifically: "Democracy has disappeared in several other great nations, not because the people of those nations disliked democracy, but because they had grown tired of unemployment and insecurity, of government confusion and government weakness. Finally, in

desperation, they chose to sacrifice liberty.” (*Universal Newsreels*, 1938 04-20). Clearly, the “other great nations” alluded to are the fascist powers, but as America has not declared war on Germany or Italy, Roosevelt, the President of the United States, is unwilling to cite them specifically in his critique and even offers sympathy with their problems by rooting the draw of fascism in the successful economic recovery in fascist nations. It is not really an indictment of fascism except that it reminds Americans of the importance of liberty. Roosevelt, recently re-elected and one of the most powerful leaders in the world, was unwilling to indict, in 1938, the violence of the Nazis or their ideology of world domination. America was not yet in a war and its President would not risk making enemies.

Chaplin, however, was willing to take large risks when making films. His film *Modern Times* (1936), for instance, critiqued the assembly line industry by turning Chaplin’s character into a human component of the complex (and fairly large) machinery of modern industry. When the tramp escapes work by hiding out in the bathroom, he is found by the ever watchful eye of the factory owner who appears on a giant screen behind Chaplin. The factory owner looks suspiciously like Henry Ford. Throughout the filming of *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin was warned against continuing with the film by his peers, but he continued on despite, and as he continued, Germany became increasingly belligerent: by the time the film was released in March of 1941, America was only months away from the brink of war. When Chaplin announced the making of the film in October of 1938, the British, anxious to appease Hitler, said they would ban it (*The Tramp and The Dictator*). Understanding the importance of Chaplin’s film, in terms of its value as propaganda, Roosevelt sent word to Chaplin assuring him that the movie

would be released in America. What Roosevelt could not say as President, Chaplin would say as world-acclaimed celebrity.

The film fulfills two important functions as an artifact to be studied in terms of its relevance in American culture. The first is that *The Great Dictator* created a depiction of Hitler that was understandable as a victim of human folly; he wasn't so much evil as he was stupid. It is easy for an audience informed about the Holocaust to look back on the prewar world and assume that the nature of Nazism, its homicidal anti-Semitism, was well known, but it simply isn't true. People knew what they saw, read, or heard, and for various reasons, those sources were confusing to many Americans. There was a dearth of actual criticisms of Hitler in national news (as evidenced by newsreel footage and the speeches of Roosevelt) and there were conflicting reports concerning Germany in American newspapers and on the radio.

The confusion is evident even in *The Great Dictator* where Chaplin is trying to portray the Nazis in the worst possible light. In Chaplin's movie, Jews live in a ghetto, political dissidents go to concentration camps, and union organizers are shot. The ghetto itself isn't a walled-in place separated from the rest of society; it's just another part of town particularly populated by Jews ethnicity. Jews who have assimilated and the issues associated with defining a Jewish race in Nazi Germany are missing entirely from the film. One is either a Jew or one is not, and the differences, as depicted by Chaplin, are quite clear.

The average Jew, in Chaplin's movie, does not go to a concentration camp; it is a fate reserved for political dissidents like, Schultz. Part of the reason the Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto offer for not rising up in rebellion is that they are afraid to be sent to a camp.

In terms of Chaplin's portrayal of Nazi anti-Semitism, Hynkel's persecution of the Jews seems, at times, more to be a function of keeping his people distracted than any real personal stake in the racism. Just before he is left alone with his globe, for instance, Hynkel professes to Garbitsch that he also hates brunettes. Hynkel's hatred is made to seem, by Chaplin, capricious and even self-destructive (Hynkel is a brunette and later in the film, he is mistaken for a Jew).

Using the film's success as an indicator, *The Great Dictator* says a great deal about the audience and their beliefs and concerns about Hitler and the Nazis. The Nazis of Chaplin's film are against unions. They are intent on turning people into human machinery. They either shoot or imprison anyone who speaks or acts against them, and they preach the oppression of the Jews to keep the country distracted from its real problems, just as their speeches lionizing pure Aryan blood cannot be taken seriously as no one giving the speeches seems to fit the description of a superior specimen, including Hitler himself. The film's success indicates a belief in its audience that, the Nazi leaders have become seduced by the thrill of world domination, and because of this seduction have lost sight of the human costs for their schemes. Their separation from the world of human happiness and suffering has turned them into self-important buffoons.

As these are the problems of Nazism as interpreted by Chaplin through the action of *The Great Dictator*, the film performs a secondary role by offering a solution to the troubles of Nazism through the Jewish barber and his final plea for humanity made at the film's denouement:

We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness, not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone, and the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but



we have lost the way. Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical; our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost. (*The Great Dictator*)

In the barber's speech, Chaplin calls out for human compassion as an answer to the problems engendered by fascism. While he also phrases the world's problems as stemming from excessive reliance on machinery—technology has caused us to become overly clever, overly hateful, and overly isolated—the speech goes on to suggest alternative, good ways to use technology for the betterment of human kind: “The airplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men; cries out for universal brotherhood; for the unity of us all” (*The Great Dictator*). By suggesting this alternative capability for modernization, he refocuses his concerns about new technology on the overall point of his speech: acceptance as a force to rival and combat the intolerance preached by Hynkel, and through Hynkel, Hitler. Later in his speech, he offers, “Let us fight to free the world! To do away with national barriers! To do away with greed, with hate and intolerance! Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness. Soldiers, in the name of democracy, let us all unite!” (*The Great Dictator*) Here again, the barber calls for the world to learn to understand each other's beliefs so as to unite. The speech is, interestingly enough, both an endorsement for democracy and global citizenship: hate and intolerance are the problem—democracy and the abolishment of national borders are the solution.

Through Chaplin's two roles, that of Hynkel and that of the Jewish barber, *The Great Dictator* provides a description of why despots act like despots, what our attitude should be about them, and what our attitude should be to make the world a place unfit for their success. It is morally instructive in this sense and divides the world between utopian and dystopian visions: a world where technology and modernization are used to subvert acceptance of each other's belief is dystopian; a world in which everyone's beliefs are valid and worthy of respect is utopian. The film provides a kind of ethical formula for separating a right kind of world view from the wrong. The generation of this formula using Nazis to provide ethical definition will become increasingly more frequent after Chaplin's film, so frequent, in fact, that it will complicate notions of evil outside of Nazi analogy and even the stability of the definition of Nazism used within these analogies. In *The Great Dictator*, however, the formula isn't necessarily about good and evil; Chaplin makes fictional Nazis to help understand the reasoning of the real Nazis, and by understanding it, to show it as ridiculous.

In his autobiography, however, Chaplin retracts the pedestrian humanization of the Nazis whom he criticizes in *The Great Dictator*. He writes of the film, "Had I known of the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made *The Great Dictator*; I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis" (392). The retraction centers on Chaplin's depiction of Hynkel and the Double Crossers. He does not indicate a regret for the sentiments offered by the barber at the film's end. Hynkel is simply not evil enough to be representative of Hitler, and this is precisely because he has been humanized by Chaplin. Real Nazi evil is not understandable as a function of misguided humanity; it is something far worse. Hynkel lacks the monstrosity to be a true

representation of Nazism precisely because Hynkel is ludicrous and not evil incarnate. His contextualization by the movie makes Hynkel, and by extension Hitler, seem ridiculous, but it is irresponsible to contextualize Nazis to make them look ridiculous—it belittles the horror of their crime. The millions dead, the bodies stacked up like cordwood and covered with lime, the mass graves, the horrors of the crematorium—none of these can be responsibly explained through the foibles of Adenoid Hynkel. The moral lesson delivered by Chaplin’s *Phoey of Tomania* is, according to Chaplin, rendered impotent. One does not fictionalize Nazis in order to understand real Nazis—one refers to Nazis in order to understand evil.

Yet, in some ways, Chaplin’s film sets up a kind of model for all Hitler analogies to follow. At the heart is the introduction of an ethical dilemma—it points out and characterizes two kinds of attitudes: one right, one wrong. In Chaplin’s original depiction, the wrong attitude is helped in its depiction by placing it within a comedic context to help accentuate that it is wrong precisely because it is ridiculous, but in Chaplin’s autobiographical retrospective statement, it is precisely this context, which he regrets. The Nazis, Chaplin seems to say in his autobiography, were so evil that their depiction as anything other than definitively evil is impossible. Nazi analogies, in general, work on this principal. Nazism is evoked because it is resistant to contextualization—its definition as evil is fixed and is referenced because of this fixity. It is the evil against which other, less fixed, evils can be compared to determine their intensity.

The advice given by the Jewish barber against Nazism, however, remains appropriate. While the Nazis cease to be driven by greed or their desire for power, and become

creatures driven by their need to do evil, tolerance remains the answer to the Nazi's intolerance. The film's message calls for the world's innovative drive to move forward in a spirit of understanding between all people and peoples. This, too, seems to be an ethical model based in the fixed value of Nazis as evil. The Nazi evil is refigured as resultant from a lack of understanding; goodness stems from open-mindedness and the ability to judge each person, and their actions, by an individual and unique standard. It would make no sense, for instance, if at the end of Chaplin's speech, he were to say that so long as everyone acts according to American values, they deserve the Earth's bounty. Instead, however they act, they are judged according to their own standard. If Hitler judges according only to his own singular standard, then acting against Hitler means taking context into account when judging the difference between good and evil. The alternative leads to a death camp.

Here, immediately, is the paradox to which all such analogies must succumb—because, of course, if everyone is to be judged according to their own individual context, then the decision to judge Nazis as evil beyond context is problematic. Chaplin suggests in this film, that the Nazis are the impetus for a change in ethical evaluation. In *The Great Dictator*, the occasion for the Jewish barber's call for greater tolerance is precisely the great intolerance of the Double Crossers of Tomania. Because their intolerance is ruining the world, tolerance is required. This indicates that the paradox of the Nazis place within the context of universal tolerance need not be resolved—it can and must go ignored: the reason that tolerance is needed is precisely because we cannot tolerate the Nazis.

Like Chaplin, with greater revelation of the atrocities, the world would find the idea of silly Nazis problematic. Even during the war, *To Be or Not To Be* (later remade by Mel Brookes) failed at the box office because it depicted the Nazi as humorous, a characterization of Nazism that would not jibe with its audience's vision of the Nazi as based on their brutality. Once footage of the death camps was revealed, the capability to show Nazis as figures derided by human weakness would become increasingly more difficult.

And yet, the Nazis would not disappear. In fact, if *The Great Dictator* provides an early model of the ways in which Nazis are employed to denote evil, then it is a model that has been used many times since its inception. Nazi references have proliferated since Chaplin, growing in scope every year, until now they are nearly ubiquitous in American culture—appearing in film, literature, popular music, television, and video games, political speeches and debates. The proliferation suggests a national definition: Nazis are evil, and evil is Nazi.

While Chaplin met with controversy in criticizing Nazis, there are now few areas where a Nazi analogy is considered off limits, their usage has become nearly ubiquitous and obligatory. Since its encounter with Nazism, American culture has become single minded, and more tolerant, as if following the advice of Chaplin's Jewish barber, but as a result of this tolerance, acceptable definitions of evil become harder to find. The function of Nazism, then, is to provide an acceptable and stable definition of evil for a culture that has, in reaction against Nazism, contextualized its ethics to become more open-minded. Nazis provide a standard for evil to be used through ethical analogies.

These analogies, now found throughout American culture, speak volumes precisely because of their national scope of their success. The choice of Nazism as a stable definition of evil for American culture says something as well about that culture's ethical values, just as the need for a stable definition of evil alone speaks to how ethics operate in a society that prizes open-mindedness. How does the endorsement of the Jewish barber for world-wide acceptance affect the acceptance, or lack thereof, that might be extended to Hynkel's beliefs, and if it doesn't, where should the line be drawn between who deserves acceptance and who doesn't? It is clear that Chaplin wouldn't have included acceptance of the Double Crossers' ideology even before revelation of the Nazi atrocities—the piles of the murdered dead were not a prerequisite for leaving them out of the Jewish barber's call for tolerance. After the revelation of the atrocities, even humanizing the Nazis so as to put them into a position where the choice between tolerating or disallowing tolerance becomes a moot point. Their ideology ceases to become the result of human weakness and becomes the result of an irrational attraction to evil which Chaplin, in his autobiography, calls insane.

Chaplin's retraction in his autobiography also suggests a kind of regret about depicting Hynkel as a figure of human weakness. By putting Hynkel and fascism into a human context, Chaplin achieves comedy, but he also undermines the presence and the danger of real evil. The problem as Chaplin comes to see it in his autobiography is that Hynkel belittles evil, and evil, real evil like the kind evidenced by the Nazis' atrocities, is not something that should be laughed away. This is a grim warning: Charlie Chaplin has found the thing that should not be laughed at.

It is this point, finally, that needs address, for if Nazis are employed with regularity to serve as a definition of evil for ethical analogies, then they are prone, and evil through them, to the kind of diminishment through contextualization warned of by Chaplin in his autobiography. When employed with such frequency and in such diverse circumstances, what, finally, does being a Nazi mean and what does it mean to be like them?

In my dissertation, I follow out the themes native to depictions of Nazism that I have begun already to describe in relation to *The Great Dictator* and describe what their presence has meant since World War II. I examine popular media in order to provide a history of Nazism's usage by the U.S. mass media to define a nationally recognized ethical system, and to determine what is implied about the beliefs of the American public by the acceptance of those publicly disseminated ethics. In particular, images of Nazism distributed throughout the culture in popular media, such as film and literature, are indicators of a national conversation surrounding definitions of good and evil which are not always based in historical accuracy.

Like Hynkel, the Nazis of the American mass media are, more often than not, reflections of American beliefs about Nazis, and less about the Nazi's historically accurate ideology or actions. Through analysis of the various agencies of this conversation, it is possible to say something about the way in which America creates, displays, and reinforces beliefs about morality for the culture in general.

The ethics of postwar America have increasingly tended towards theories of nature and nurture to explain the acts of humankind as the results of social construction, language usage, dysfunctional families, biological predisposition, popular fads, untreated mental illness, pharmaceutical side effects, and so on. With these contexts available to

explain action, compassion and understanding become the basis for ethical evaluation.

The narratives of good and evil, as independent forces, have had decreasing influence on ethical responses nationwide and especially within mass produced discourse intended to represent and appeal to an average American viewpoint. Part of this shift is related to the backlash against the intolerance of the Nazis as suggested by Chaplin through the speech given by the Jewish barber.

Like Chaplin's original plea in *The Great Dictator*, mass culture in America tends to rely on an ethical rhetoric based on appeals to understanding problems individually.

Thus explanations of aberrant behavior, avoiding the use of good or evil as forces, utilize new forces. When horrible crimes are committed, for instance, they are explained through mass culture by way of psychology, biology, or socio-economic conditions, just as Hynkel was explained through the human weakness of ambition and greed. We may as easily think of mass murderers as crazy as we would be to think of them as evil, and if not crazy, then reacting to some social condition such as a childhood defined in street violence, or an apathy bred from watching too many violent images on television. Evil ceases to be a recognizable characteristic even in the worst of society's horrors.

But just as Chaplin's autobiography warns, with the loss of evil, ethics, as a system, must change tenor as well. If every instance of ethical analysis must be analyzed on its own terms then categories such as good and evil, right and wrong, or perhaps just acceptable and unacceptable do not carry from situation to situation. An ethical system that provides individualized explanations through these overarching descriptions of influence (whether social, genetic, pharmaceutical, or other) becomes, by definition, ineffective: ethics are a framework to divide action into categories which these



descriptions of influence deny—in this scheme, the influence is responsible for the actions and not the individual and thus the individual can't be evil.

Fortunately, despite the number of influences that now take responsibility for our actions, most Americans still know what evil is. When they think of it, they are likely to think of Nazis or, perhaps, the devil, the presence of the latter being increasingly muted within public circles due to the concerns of America's polytheistic society and contemporary concerns of contextualizing evil rather than mythicizing it. The devil is a creature recognizable, to some Americans, as real, but to many others as a creature of superstition: a symbol of evil with no real historical presence. Moreover, it lacks the necessary consensus to be ubiquitous throughout national culture. In the image of the Nazi, however, Americans continue to acknowledge and personify an evil in historical example that is above explanation, apology, or comprehension. No appeal to influence may adequately explain Hitler—even the attempt to explain Hitler seems morally misguided as if it risks diminishing the severity of his horror. The crematorium is a place where an evil happened that is resistant to diminishment through study or theory—a place that the majority of the postwar rhetoric insinuates should be met with a reverent silence, not with words of explanation.

Depictions within mass culture demonstrate that America recognizes the evil of Nazism, but they also demonstrate a belief which Chaplin could not have anticipated in 1938 when he began making *The Great Dictator*. America would see itself postwar as the defeater of Nazis, not through an increase in tolerance or the breaking down of national borders, but through the act of war. Just as the intolerance of the Nazis made the

tolerance preached by the Jewish barber virtuous as a way to defeat Nazism, so too did victory over the Nazis make Americans virtuous through their war effort.

Through reminders of this victory, America acknowledges itself as inherently good; he who slays the dragon is, by definition, a dragon slayer. Thus, at times when the nation needs reminders of its inherent national goodness, films set in World War II become suddenly popular again. The ‘good war’ is hauled out to take yet another victory lap around the patriotic track of our sentiments. Some sixty years after the defeat of Nazism, Hitler and his followers are still, for many, the epitome of what Americans think of as evil, even during an era in which notions of good and evil are increasingly abandoned in favor of individual explanations of behavior related to various influences.

Chaplin saw the isolation, greed, and intolerance of the Nazis as a function of the modern age. He was not alone in seeing the world’s political and social problems as resultant from modern industrialization. In Walter Benjamin’s account of the Nazi’s rise to power within “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), for instance, he explains modern politics as the effect of an increased reliance on machines and automated industry. His essay is, ostensibly, a political theory of aesthetics. He sees the ability to mass produce art as causing the death of art’s capacity to evoke truths which act independent of explanation or influence—mechanical reproduction prevents art from defining good or evil for its audience.

For Benjamin, the reaction against the death of this “cult value” for art—the loss of its capacity to act as a conduit between its audience and transcendent truths—is a prerequisite for the rise of fascism. By experiencing art, a person, before the age of mechanical reproduction, was put in touch with something greater than his or herself.

Similar to Chaplin's argument through the Jewish barber, Benjamin argues that the mechanical age has made it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to have such a singular, personal, experience. Instead, the relationship of individual to art became one of influence, and the experience of the art became political.

Benjamin suggests that art from the modern period, with its concentration on the inner life of the average person, was an extension of the democratization that had killed cult value. Instead of a private one-on-one relationship with essential truths, the experience became public, the inner life revealed. The essential truths ceased to be of importance, the experience of those truths having overtaken them in prominence. Eventually, identity became truer than essential values. Truth depended on experience, a view that Chaplin would endorse with *The Great Dictator*.

According to Benjamin, this concentration on the individual is paradoxically the cause of the great rallies at Nuremberg. Nazism is, from this standpoint, an attempt to reinvigorate art with its cult value—to make it, once again, act as a conduit to essential truths. The relationship is, however, modified by the fascist concerns of the art—particularly the stigma attached to private thoughts, acts, and opinion. Through the ritual and regalia of Nazism, the goal was to create a simultaneous and homogenous experience of the transcendent, not just for the individual but for the nation. Thus, *Ein Land, ein Volk, ein Führer*. As with Chaplin, Benjamin felt that the corruption of the process by which people (before mechanical reproduction, individuals, and after, the masses) were put in touch with transcendent values owed its success to over reliance on mechanical technology.

The aesthetic purpose of Benjamin's essay is of course its most salient feature, but Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is not just about the work of art; it is about the capacity to receive transcendent truths given the ease with which versions of the truth can be reproduced. It is as much about history as it is about art. Benjamin writes, for instance, that "the situation into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated" (Benjamin 221). What this means for something like Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* is precisely the regret suggested in Chaplin's autobiography: *The Great Dictator* doesn't, necessarily, touch Hitler (though there is some speculation that he did see the film)—it doesn't cause him to change his action—the existence of the film, however, depreciates Hitler's presence as a monster. Benjamin continues, "This [depreciation] holds not only for the art work but also for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score" (Benjamin 221). Thus, *The Great Dictator* has an authenticity that is interfered with—the natural object upon which it is based, the evil of the Nazis, is not immediately at risk.

As, however, Benjamin posits that "the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced," he is creating a condition based in narrative. The essential characteristic *as it is transmitted* constitutes authenticity. This transmission occurs in two ways: through the thing's condition as an existent, its substantive duration, and through its testimony, to the history of its experience. Thus, the

authenticity of Nazis is generated not only from their presence of actual proponents of an ideology, but also through the way that the term, Nazi, can signify a historical account involving Nazism. On this point, Benjamin concludes, “since the historical testimony rests on authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object” (Benjamin 221).

Benjamin’s point, then, is that reproduction of a thing, once it is only an agent of historical testimony (when it has otherwise ceased to be), risks the item’s authenticity—it *becomes* the stories told about it. Any affect on those stories, then, also has an effect on the thing itself as a creation of the stories. Nazism after the Second World War, for instance, lacks substantive duration (or more to the point, its substantive duration has run out through their defeat), and thus, Nazism becomes stories about Nazism. If the stories become affected, for instance, by portraying Hitler as Hynkel, then the authority of Nazism is affected as well—and in Benjamin’s terms, this authority represents a transmitted essence.

What mechanical reproduction allowed for, according to Benjamin, was not just conglomerate experience, but also the revelation of the mechanisms of experience, and its separation from essence. By revealing the aesthetic of the inner life, by promoting the transmission of essential truths above the essential truths themselves, modern art had effectively created a blueprint for improving propaganda: one need only point to the celebration of experience rather than essence as cultural decadence. Hitler and his ilk used this new propaganda to create their patriotic ritual to otherwise wipe out the aesthetic of individualism that modern art had celebrated; to lay claim to the possibility of

providing new ways of approaching essential truths in a manner like that of art's purpose before mechanical reproduction; to reinvigorate art's ritualistic function inside of its new political schema by creating political ritual. The "art" associated with mechanical reproduction was self-destructive because its logical end result was the fascism that would destroy it.

Benjamin did not live long enough to see fascism destroyed nor did he speculate as to what art would look like, still mechanically reproduced, in the age after its antithesis had reached its end. It's erroneous to think of ages ending in discrete stops. The Romantic era did not end with the beginning of the Victorian, the Victorian with the beginning of the Modern. The aesthetics and philosophy associated with an era may wane in popularity but rarely does the new age eradicate all evidence of the old.

The same holds for the post-fascist age: as surely as Nazism was defeated, the political ritual of patriotism that empowered fascism had also empowered its defeat (when manifested in its enemies) and remained to bolster its enemy's national self image after the prominence of fascism had ended. America's own national ritual of imagining itself the rescuer of Europe was otherwise engendered by the defeat of Nazi Germany which would become, in that new narrative, the epitome of evil for the ethics of a new age.

Though America entered the postwar period partially reliant upon a nationalistic vision of the immutable truth of its own virtue (the mobilization of that opinion had, after all, gotten the nation through a Second Great War), the terms of that truth were very different from those of the Nazis. The Nazis had followed a rigid codification of ethics in which right and wrong were clearly defined through social codes and laws with few, if

any, moral grey areas or blurred lines; the rigidity of American postwar ethics resulted from its reliance on a particular exemplification of evil: Nazi Germany.

In national outlets of the America media, iniquity and injustice began increasingly to be portrayed postwar through analogies to Nazism. Their evil was useful as a point of comparison for other evils. This use of Nazism as an epitome of evil was neither arbitrary nor exclusive. It was located in the wartime enemy, an emblem available for the hatred of all Americans through the conglomerate patriotic project of war. Chaplin used an indictment of Nazi intolerance to endorse universal compassion. The American mass media indicted Nazi's most salient features (racism, imperial belligerence, authoritarianism) to endorse the virtue of the 'American way' or to attack enemies of the state.

The result was similar to the division implied by Hynkel and the Jewish barber—division between Democratic America and Nazi Germany naturally created a division between utopian and dystopian social values. America in its national discourse could call upon the Nazi to act as a recognized definition of essential evil in order to provide an example of what one should not do, how one should not behave, and what one should not want to become—one should avoid being like the Nazis. Not only personal but national ethics could be created through this analogy.

This dissertation shows how postwar America developed, and continues to develop, its national ethic through the use of an epitome: Nazism, how it reproduces this epitome, and what this reproduction to the authority of the essential ethical positions of good and evil. To do this, I examine the history of America's beliefs about the Nazis and the Nazi

atrocities as evidenced in sources ranging from before the war until now, and the use of that knowledge within its nationally disseminated ethical arguments.

The use of Nazism as an ethical epitome is fraught with a paradox similar to the one produced by Chaplin through the appeal of the Jewish barber—in their historical testimony, the Nazis are depicted as strong advocates of essential value: racial supremacy; Deutschland über alles; Ein Land, ein Volk, ein Führer. Thus, anti-Nazi sentiments naturally imply a movement away from systems that rely on essential immutable values and towards values that change depending on the context of the evaluation. Ultimately, my claim is that America, in propagating an anti-Nazi self image, publicly advocates for context dependent ethics in which right and wrong or good and evil are judged from situation to situation. This reaction, however, is the result of a belief in an ethical epitome: it implies that the choice of context dependent ethics was an attempt to *not* be like the Nazis, particularly because the Nazis are deemed essentially evil.

The choice to evaluate ethics through analysis of contexts and their influences is complicated because it depends on a belief in the non-contextual, essentially evil nature of the Nazis. In a context dependent system, one would expect to find no place for immutable values (like Nazism as inherently evil), but in fact, as the perseverance of Nazism as an epitome of evil intimates, this is simply not the case. Nazism becomes the apparent immutable truth which American mass culture's reference system, otherwise concentrated on issues of influence, employs as a measuring standard against which it can compare all other problems and evils.



Because Nazism is used to establish an ethical standard in a variety of disparate situations, however, its definition is subject to the changes warned of in Chaplin's autobiography and Benjamin's theory: over time and through usage, the value of Nazi evil, too, becomes context dependent—it becomes a value determined by the stories and analogies in which it is evoked. Like art, mechanically reproduced, the usage of Nazism as a standard ceases to be a function of its appropriateness to context. Nazism remains in each of these cases an epitome, but the implication of being evoked in a variety of context is that the point of reference implied by Nazism—its meaning—changes in nature.

The nature of evil, described by analogy to this protean Nazi, must also change, becoming diffused and confused through over-contextualization. Postwar American ethics has become a complex interchange between the context dependent values it publicly recognizes and the essential value it must habitually reference. The result is a kind of irony, like Chaplin's tolerance: tolerant to all but the intolerant. This paradox, ultimately, undermines the stability of definitions of good and evil upon which the ethical system must rely. Nazis are evil, but which Nazi are being discussed: soup Nazis, historical Nazis, Nazis from Mel Brooks's films or from Stephen King's stories, the cybernetic villain from *Hellboy* or Joseph Mengele from *The Boys From Brazil*? Who should one not be like? What are the Nazis of the American imagination, and how did they come to be that?

In some ways, I am documenting a history of the American imagination as it creates a fictional place: the Nazi Germany that America accepts as real. My goal is not to suggest that Nazi Germany is not real or that the atrocities committed by the Nazis were not

heinous; I am neither a Holocaust denier nor a Nazi apologist. However, America's version of Nazi Germany as a real place is as problematic as Chaplain's Tomania as an accurate depiction of Nazi Germany. For instance, discussions of America's considerations of the Holocaust committed by Germany are necessarily embedded in context. When Americans have discussed the Holocaust they constructed their understanding, first from camp liberation newsreels (which barely mentioned Jews), later, from newsreels that discussed the Nuremberg trials (also equally reticent to mention Jewish victims), from the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and later still, from *Schindler's List*? Which of these are real? From which of these does America gain its definition of evil?

My suggestion is that 'real' is not a criterion which can be relied upon for analyzing America's ethical systems. Even accuracy is problematic since remarkably inaccurate representations of Nazi Germany are both allowed and widely disseminated (witness *Hogan's Heroes*, the Empire of *Star Wars*, or Ralph Bakshi's *Wizards*) and relatively inaccurate depictions have still impacted America enough for Nazis to attain the position of ultimate evil. In mass American culture, for instance, notions of totalitarianism were founded upon an anti-Semitic enemy, but the undercurrents of the enemy's racism were otherwise ignored allowing America to ignore, by extension, its own prejudices well into the 1950s. The enemy's anti-Semitism was made to seem somehow different than its homegrown counterpart—a position which the civil rights counter culture argued against also through the metaphor of Nazism.

Regardless of its artifice, the Nazi Germany of America's imagination is very real in its effect. The ethical system engendered by these depictions of Nazism creates values

that are certainly as real as biological determinism and social construction, and in validating America's ethical system, this false Germany is made to seem even more real than its historical counterpart.

Because my project concerns national values, I draw source material for my analysis from sources that were distributed nationally. I recognize value in literature as representing the acceptable arguments of a certain portion of America's population, and I certainly see the value in literature of successful social critique and satire as offering insight into American values. However, next to authors like Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, Sylvia Plath, and Thomas Pynchon, my analysis also relies heavily on nationally available examples of American ethics at work such as popular film, public political statement and action, magazine stories meant to appeal to a wide audience, and various forms of state and privately sanctioned propaganda. Publicity is better than obscurity for evidentiary support of arguments about national narratives. Chaplin works as an example of a depiction of Nazism precisely because of the scale of its success.

The goal of this work is to provide cultural criticism which is sometimes at odds with the special place afforded the idea of literary criticism. This consideration is guided by two distinct principals. First, that in a consumer culture, the success of a medium in regards to its capacity for cultural dissemination can be determined by its financial success. Essentially, people are willing to pay for the visions of culture which they hold to be accurate or to which they aspire. Thus, such visions that receive public support as measured by financial success represent visions which are advocated for by a large population of the culture. It follows, then, that such visions represent mass culture. This

description of popular culture and its capacity for reading mass culture is derived from Siegfried Kracauer's assumptions in *From Caligari to Hitler*. Central to his assumption is the underlying principal that "films address themselves, and appeal, to the anonymous multitude. Popular films—or, to be more precise, popular screen motifs—can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires" (Kracauer 5).

In some ways, my own work here represents a next obvious step to the work done by Kracauer: he attempts to show evidence of the coming of the Nazis in the products of the culture that preceded Hitler's ascendancy; I am demonstrating the manner in which the presence of the Nazi echoes in the mass cultural artifacts of the society that caused his demise.

Kracauer is an obvious antecedent to this reading of mass culture, but he is not the final word. His position is to choose between cultural artifacts—film rather than literature. I am not so convinced of the efficacy of one or the other (or even that these two combined can adequately represent mass culture). Instead, I concur with John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg in their introduction to *The Vietnam War and American Culture*:

It is, of course, no longer possible to speak of some clear distinction between "mass" and "popular" media, just as it is impossible to imagine any specific boundary separating mass culture from popular culture. But this confusion of realms need not mean merely that popular resistance to mass domination is impossible; it can also mean that the genuinely popular and critical media might find a larger and more sophisticated audience than expected. (x)

Berg and Rowe go on to suggest that through the lens of mass culture, literature must be seen as performing ideological, rather than humane, work. Literature, when used in the task of analyzing mass culture, acts then as a reflection of mass cultural desires, an attempt to indoctrinate the culture to those desires, and finally as a critique of those desires. It becomes a tool of cultural, rather than literary, criticism.

Finally, literature alone cannot perform the necessary task of describing what Kracauer calls the inner dispositions of a people (11). As Berg and Rowe suggest, “cultural criticism cannot contribute significantly to cultural politics until it investigates carefully the ways in which apparently discrete media work in more profoundly coordinated way” (x). It is necessary, then, in a work of cultural criticism to examine the places where sites of acculturation intersect: not just books, not just books and film, but books, films, political speeches, works of obvious propaganda, manifestoes, broadcasts, television shows, and so forth. Only through such a polymath method can the dispositions of a culture be properly vetted.

Part of the design of this Polymath method is to demonstrate the ubiquity of a specific motif: in this case, Nazism as a metaphor for evil. My examples, then must perform two functions: not only must they show the operation of American ethics but they must also provide a cross section of contexts in which American ethical values manifest. The goal of this analysis is not to provide comprehensive analysis or in-depth readings of particular works. I cannot, here, list all the places in American culture where Nazis are referenced in the name of establishing a definition of evil, nor would it serve to offer entire chapters to readings of *Gravity's Rainbow* or Langston Hughes's testimony before Joseph McCarthy and the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Ubiquity suggests that there will always be another context in which Nazis are referenced and another example in which Nazism is evoked to provide a definition of evil. The one's I provide are simply demonstrative of a trend in mass culture, an establishment of the length of time in which that trend has been evident, and a description of the way that trend has operated and changed over the years. I believe, however, that my examples

provide a wide enough base for my argument in order to support concerns about inclusive representation, historical attitudes, and contemporary attitudes without their becoming too facile to serve due to the limited scope of the examples. I am producing a means by which to study Nazi analogies within American culture, ethical systems based in analogy, and the dependence that mass American culture has on ethical systems based in analogy. By necessity, I am attempting a much larger critique of America's context dependent attitudes by showing their paradoxical reliance on a fixed and essential value.

No study of this kind has yet been produced to explain America's compulsion towards reproducing the image of Nazism decades after Nazi Germany's defeat. As I've already mentioned, the work of Siegfried Kracauer provides a kind of foundation for my own but ends where my own work begins. Saul Friedlander has done notable work on the post-war fascination with the Nazi figure in *Reflections of Nazism: an Essay on Kitsch and Death*, but his work concentrates on the unique position of postwar Germany and its attempt to rescue its traditions from the rhetorical ploys of Hitler and his cronies. Similarly, a considerable body of scholarship exists concerning the Holocaust and American culture, but these works generally focus on Jewish identity, the potential problems with mass producing images of atrocity, and the aftereffects of widespread trauma. They are only marginally concerned with representations of the perpetrators, especially representations for which historical accuracy is not a consideration.

There are numerous works to which my own is second cousin, particularly works that deal with the Holocaust in mass culture. I owe a great deal to these works, but in some ways, this book is a response to the erroneous assumption that America's fascination with Nazis is necessarily a fascination with the Holocaust. The ubiquity of Nazi metaphor in

America's mass cultural ethical language predates the modern understanding of the Nazi atrocities as crimes predominantly against Jews by many years, arguably even decades. The success of Schindler's List (1993) was likely owed to a national fascination with the Holocaust. The success of The Dirty Dozen (1967) likely was not. Even now, post-Schindler's List and the National Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., Nazi analogies are still employed and often without any overt reference to the Holocaust whatsoever. Are opponents of national health care insisting that President Obama wants to kill 6 million Americans when they call him a Nazi?

Part of the confusion about what is implied by a reference to the Nazis, Nazi Germany, or Hitler owes to the protean meaning of Nazism in American mass culture. Nazism is sometimes linked directly to the Holocaust. Other times, it implies invasive imperialism, other times totalitarianism, and still other times authoritarianism. Moreover, the specific history of Nazism, particularly their atrocities and their defeat by American forces have made Nazis symbols for human rights violations in general as well as powerful symbols in America's arguments about its own national virtue.

Finally, even the definition of Nazism is confused in this rhetoric. While the use of Hitler or Auschwitz obviously refer to a cultural definition of Nazism, but terms like fascism, totalitarianism, and nationalism are far less obvious. The latter term has come to mean militant patriotism and is most often ascribed to terrorist sensibilities. The Irish Republican Army and the Palestinian Liberation Organization are nationalist organizations as is Storm Front and the Ku Klux Klan. Yet, while nationalism is often used as an ideological pejorative, militant African American groups in the late 60s

enthusiastically referred to themselves as Black Nationalists suggesting that they either ignored the implication or invited it.

Because Nazism is a nationalist ideology (it professes the superiority of the German people to all other people and the German nation to all other nations) arguments about nationalism employ references to Nazism, and vice versa, with such frequency that the two terms seem indistinguishable. Likewise, fascism is essentially the same as Nazism in the American imagination and is used interchangeably with Nazism even in rhetoric employed as early as in speeches immediately following the Second World War.

These terms, however, are as subject to change as the meaning of Nazism to which they refer. Fascism sometimes means right wing nationalism (as it does for Angela Davis, for instance), other times, it means anti-democratic principles (as it does for Theodore Adorno), and other times, it means obsession with rules or procedures. In most cases, it means its meaning can shift between all three in a single work.

The definitions of these words are, then, contingent upon another definition, Nazism, the meaning of which is the subject of this work. To be fascist, to be a nationalist or totalitarian, has meant different things at different times, but it has generally denoted a reference to Nazism which has, itself, meant different things at different times. Thus, the bulk of this work is devoted to elucidating the changes in Nazism's meaning as it is used in American mass culture.

In my first chapter, *Reductio Ad Hitlerum Ad Nauseum: Finding the Meaning of Nazi Analogies for American Culture*, I discuss the theoretical concerns that relate to, or are necessitated by, my argument concerning the interplay between context dependent evaluation and essential immutable truth. Of primary focus are two specific scholarly



problems evoked by this study: my assumptions about the possibility of a unifying feature in American culture which undergird my presumptions, and second my management of logical paradox that is inherently produced from the subject matter.

In this chapter, I address the repercussions from my consciously making claims about American culture as a singularity. What I am specifically suggesting is that there is a shared value for American ethics and, therefore, a commonality in American experiences. Ultimately, in studies of American culture, suggesting unification of national culture, even as singular as its ethics, is taboo—a transgression of rules put in place for good reason. Nonetheless, my argument is not about a subgroup within America, and it is certainly not about one aspect of American life.

In a very restricted sense (that of American ethics as evidenced in national media and their operation for national, activist, and identity politics), I am, in fact, making assumptions about a shared experience by Americans: the belief that Nazis are evil and the belief that their evil is not dependent on context. Of course, there are always exceptions. Nonetheless, an argument that concerns ubiquity in culture, by necessity must show saturation within that culture—the capacity for Nazi analogy to appear appropriate no matter the context in which it is made.

In order to create the history of America's imagination, as represented by its mass media, then, I first address the concerns about American myths (how they are made and what they come to mean) and then provide a description of the analytical process necessitated by culture-wide phenomena such as these myths. In particular, this method will be used to examine mass American culture's representation of Nazi Germany as a

mythological system of ethical meaning making. By comparing real action to assumptions related to the myth, ethics are analogously generated.

I use established cultural theory to address the rather significant problem of paradox resultant from talking about essentialist truth within a context dependent system especially through the evocation of epitome. Epitome implies an essential eternal truth which has been epitomized—the kind of essential value that Benjamin suggested was once accessible through art. Postwar America has tended towards context-dependent descriptions of influence, and essentialism has been made to bear the stigma of nostalgia: it recalls a naïve age when people believed in such things as Truth and Justice, Good and Evil. Nonetheless, I am arguing that at the heart of context dependent evaluation is an appeal to essentialism through the ethical epitome of Nazism; far from claiming that paradox dissolves America's ethical system, I am arguing that American ethics is fueled by it.

To describe this process, I utilize critical positions that reconcile systems of essential value with systems of context-dependent values—namely the philosophies of neo-pragmatism and postmodernism in which values, and therefore diametric opposition, are rooted in utility and the occasions of language. I do not take either of these philosophical positions at their extremes, which would suggest either that I am examining the appearance or function of paradox instead of its reality. Instead, I posit the real need to navigate a paradox, and suggest tactics to be employed in this navigation. Ultimately, though, the paradox remains and must be recognized if not reconciled. The remaining chapters bear out these maneuvers and their repercussions through the history of postwar America as recorded through the various agencies of mass culture.

Finally, much of the reason that theoretical frameworks are so heavily relied on in this dissertation is related to the scope of the argument being made. Suggesting that Nazism as an ethical trope in mass American culture would suggest finding evidence of that trope and explaining those evidentiary moments, but claiming that the trope is ubiquitous in the sense that it is available to any mass American argument or depiction of evil, and that this availability has meant that the trope is put to use with increasing frequency and scope is to suggest that there are likely to be countless examples of Nazism being used in the manner I am describing. Part of my larger argument concerns scope of use and overuse precisely because of cultural saturation. Theoretical frameworks are necessary, then, to describe the countless examples that simply could not be included for reasons of space. I have put the theoretical concerns in place to show how one might read *Dr. Strangelove*, for instance, but the implication is that that same methodology can be used to read the other cultural artifacts, as valid as *Dr. Strangelove*, that could not be addressed here.

In a sense, I am creating a theoretical system by synthesizing the ideas present in various cultural theorists, thinkers, and artists to create a single method that can be applied and then proving, through its application, its validity. I am not, however, choosing examples at random. The Nazi analogies discussed throughout this work were chosen to not only show the validity of the evaluative system but to also show history of an ever widening scope for Nazi analogies. They then perform a kind of triple duty by showing a system of evaluation in practice, to show the proliferation of Nazi analogies, and to, finally, show the repercussion of that proliferation.

Chapter two, *From Hun to Holocaust: America's Depictions of Nazism Before and After Camp Liberation*, describes context dependent evaluation as a reaction against fascism and elucidates the particulars of that reaction's process. In particular, I look at fiction's reactions to essentialism in general, and Nazism in particular, prewar and then the postwar change in those reactions. My goal is to make plain the shift in political and ethical climate against the belief in essential truths, and to give some indication of how that particular shift came about. The language of this shift is one of utopian and dystopian visions—how does America envision in its mass disseminated sources, the notion of a perfect world, or more commonly, its vision of a world set to self destruct because of its values.

The history of Nazi analogy is utilized in this chapter by first looking at the ways in which mass American culture's version of the Nazi developed, how they were utilized in the war (Nazi analogies used to describe Nazis in wartime propaganda), and the ways in which aspects of this depiction became difficult to reconcile with the self-image America disseminated in the agencies of its postwar mass culture.

Chapter three, *America Über Alles: The Lure and the Danger of Postwar American Patriotism*, looks to fiction to provide a description of how America moves from one kind of utopian vision in which traditional values are seen as leading to a better world to another kind of utopian vision in which those same traditional values engender disaster, corruption and tragedy. The goal of this chapter is to provide a counterpoint to the impending sense of American patriotic valor that increasingly describes America's involvement in the Cold War.

Chapter Four, *The Third Reich and the Red Menace: The Use of Nazis in American Anti-Communist Propaganda*, concerns America's national narrative and its usage of Nazism as an epitome of evil, especially as it concerns the fabrication of patriotism for the purpose of justifying war and demonizing Communism as the enemy. Whereas chapter two and three examine the use of Nazism to endorse explanations of aberrant behavior through influential contexts and the critique of evaluation through essentialism, the fourth chapter describes the transformation of the national myth concerning Nazi Germany through its various uses against non-Nazis, which are, because of analogy, imbued with Nazi evil. If Nazis are the result of the stories told about them, then they become, also, the result of stories told about non-Nazis that evoke Nazism in analogy. Namely through the auspice of "totalitarianism," Nazism is used to demonize its political opposite: communism, thus, the definition of Nazism becomes informed by stories told about communists. The process of castigating the non-Nazi enemy according to an ethical epitome has already been described in theoretical and fictional terms. The historical record of this process, through its utilization in Cold War propaganda, validates the theoretical assumptions and provides real world political examples of the process within mass American culture.

Chapter five, *The Matinee War: Selling the War Against Communism with World War II*, continues this process by examining the use of Nazism for America's fight against Communism against the backdrop of the popularity of World War II narratives within the popular culture of that era. The analysis demonstrates that, since the close of World War II, the American mass media has continually turned to the glory of fighting

Nazi Germany so as to raise support for whatever conflict it finds itself in, even when the nation's enemies bear no resemblance to their Nazi stand-ins.

Chapter six, *Nazism, McCarthyism, and the Counterculture: The Place of Race in Nazi Analogies*, examines the use of Nazism in American domestic political language. By first showing how the anti-Communist community rooted out its traitors utilizing a revised definition of Nazism as an epitome of evil, I show how completely this ethical language is diffused throughout American culture. Its use within the official language of the American state allows for the use of Nazism as a mechanism of Cold War propaganda both at home and abroad. In this sixth chapter, however, I begin to widen the usage of Nazism to extend to non-state sponsored political movements—the definition of Nazism becomes the result of political language like that used in McCarthyism, civil rights activism, and anti-war protest.

Chapter seven, *The Repercussions of Ubiquity: A Context for Every Evil and an Evil for Every Context*, shows American political organizations and their use of Nazism against their enemies: often counting the American state or “establishment” within that number. By utilizing the rhetoric of the civil rights and nuclear disarmament movements, I show how easily any group can adopt the Nazi as their own for describing their enemies. Through these examples, I demonstrate that the Nazis characteristics are subject to flux depending on the issues for which they are utilized. Most importantly, I show that historical accuracy is not needed for this utilization. The Nazis of American rhetoric need only bear passing resemblance to the Nazis of history.

Chapter seven serves to show the scope of Nazism's use and the resulting effacement of its meaning. As the chapters have progressed from, first, utilizing Nazis to castigate

issues directly related to Nazism to, second, utilizing Nazism to demonize American enemies to, third, American organizations' use of Nazism to demonize their enemies to, fourth, individual use of Nazism to demonize personal enemies, the end result of these comparisons is that anyone can bring up Nazism to castigate whatever opponents or positions they wish to protest.

The meaning of Nazism, stretched to fit every instance of its evocation, becomes facile, as does the meaning of evil itself through Nazism's use as an epitome of evil. Nazism loses its significance as an essential evil and takes on a value dependent to the argument in which it is evoked. Paradoxically, the frequency of its utilization betrays the belief that Nazism is still essential—it must be; otherwise, it wouldn't be put to such widespread usage.

Nazism's position reveals two paradoxes at the center of American ethics, the same two paradoxes discovered early on by Chaplin and Benjamin. The first is that the move away from inherent values was a reaction to the Nazism's essentialist character, but that the resultant system required Nazism for stability. This is the paradox of the Jewish barber who preaches universal tolerance as a position intolerant of Nazi intolerance. Second, though Nazism as an epitome of evil has provided stability for a system which changes depending on evaluative context, overuse has quietly removed that stability. The result is that America's obligatory definition of evil has become divorced from its ethical or historical validity. It is, as Benjamin predicts, the sum of the testimony (however fantastic) about its history, and not of the history itself.

To examine this paradox, chapter seven examines two varieties of texts: first, texts that personalize the invective of Nazism as an epitome of evil, and second, texts that

satirize the implication of that personal invective for American culture. The first variety of texts is utilized especially to highlight the confused nature of ethics when the position of evil is epitomized by Nazism in sources which nationally disseminate American culture. The satirical texts lay bare the structure of this confusion—why it occurs, its causes, and so on. The second and seventh chapter bookend the subject, in that ethics turn away from essential values because of the damage they wreaked upon the landscape of ethics worldwide through the Nazi atrocities, and the last chapter shows how context dependent ethical evaluation has all but eliminated mass American culture's capacity to make any ethical evaluation whatsoever.

If, as Benjamin posited, ethics in the age of mechanical reproduction began to wane with the loss of individual access to transcendent values like good and evil, and continued its decline through the corresponding endorsement of statewide definitions of ethics, then the final step of this decline has been the replacement of ethics with politics: truth with propaganda, and inequity with its exemplar. Finally, when mass produced, even the exemplar evil of Nazism loses meaning, leaving only the vaguest notion of evil to prompt ethical evaluations, but not enough to give those evaluations any validity.

American culture is, thus, surrounded by evils which it is at odds to identify with consensus. While personal definitions are still perfectly valid in private beliefs, without a social impetus of a conglomerate definition of evil to act against, public acts of refutation and activism are rendered impotent through an ever growing multitude of contexts with equal claims to attention. All arguments have equal claim to utilize the Nazis to accentuate follies and virtues. References to Nazism, having proliferated through



repetition to the point of ubiquity, have become also obligatory; their significance muted out by their inevitability.

## CHAPTER 1

### REDUCTIO AD HITLERUM AD NAUSEUM: FINDING THE MEANING OF NAZI ANALOGIES FOR AMERICAN CULTURE

In the public arenas of the Internet, the inevitability of Nazi analogy is described by an adage known as Godwin's Law. Named for Mike Godwin who originally coined the phrase in 1990, the law states: "As a Usenet discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1," or put another way, the longer any debate runs, the greater the likelihood that Nazis will be mentioned. Still in use, Usenet is a forerunner to Internet posting boards, chatrooms, and similar on-line features in which participants post comments and reply to others' comments on nearly any subject conceivable. Godwin's law is used to determine when a Usenet discussion has effectively ended and when participation has devolved into mud slinging.

According to the Usenet Frequently Asked Questions archive:

[Nazis] are generally considered the most evil group of people to live in modern times, and to compare something or someone to them is usually considered the gravest insult imaginable...As a Usenet discussion gets longer it tends to get more heated; as more heat enters the discussion, tensions get higher and people start to insult each other over anything they can think of. Godwin's Law merely notes that, eventually, those tensions eventually cause someone to find the worst insults that come to mind - which will almost always include a Nazi comparison. (Skirvin)

The applicability of Godwin's Law is partly a product of its context. As Skirvin points out, Usenet is often the site of heated debate and the voicing of unpopular opinion. They and their contemporary electronic descendents also serve as public meeting places for strangers and for people who know each other only through their online presences.

Whatever is said in these forums has little effect out in the "real" world. One's reputation

as a sane and decent member of society (or lack of that reputation) cannot normally be damaged by things said online because identities are hidden behind user names and a lack of physical presence. The existence of Godwin's law suggests, however, that people who could take any position whatsoever without fear of real world repercussions still acknowledge the evil of Nazism. Even in these circumstances of total anonymity, a reference to Nazism always devolves the conversation.

Much of the reason that arguments on Internet posting can turn into the trading of vicious insult is because of this anonymity. The lack of social constraint, hallmark of Internet communication, often translates into a lack of personal restraint, the casualties of which are the shared cultural values that would guide social interaction in normal circumstances. In this environment, Godwin's Law works because, as people argue over values that they do not share, abandoning more and more of the rules of social decorum and debate, their need increases for some touchstone position that is uncontested and above reproach—a stable set of values that everyone can recognize, even as all other social values fall away. Those engaged in online debate desperately find themselves in need of something to which they can appeal which will instantaneously decide, however tenuously, between right and wrong. Thus, as values become less and less stable in the online argument, the greater the likelihood that someone will bring up Nazis, Hitler, or Nazism in order to artificially concretize morality. The result is, of course, either that whatever is compared to Nazism, becomes like Nazism, and therefore wrong, or in supporting something that shares a similarity to Nazism, one's opponent is marked as either a Nazi or a Nazi sympathizer.

Godwin's Law is successful at predicting human behavior only because Nazis are popularly recognized as evil—popular enough for this recognition to have a colloquialism associated with it. Godwin's Law would not work if this recognition were not widespread throughout the culture of those on the Internet. It would not work, for instance, if one did not recognize that being like a Nazi is bad. Nazis are referenced with such frequency because it is commonly acknowledged that whatever is like the Nazis, however tenuous the connection, is deemed morally wrong. Moreover, a denial of this logic carries with it the stigma of Nazi sympathies. One must, in effect, either accept or acknowledge others' acceptance that Nazis are evil lest one be branded evil as well. If this were not all true, one could not trust Godwin's Law to work.

This is not to suggest that the Internet does not have its share of blatant anti-Semites. While identification with Nazism is, unfortunately, common enough practice on the Internet, the reaction to electronic Nazi sympathizers is never serious debate. In fact, to be taken seriously on the Internet one must avoid being branded as acting like a Nazi and, therefore, being dismissed out of hand. According to Skirvin's description of Godwin's law, debate with Neo-Nazis is "probably the quickest path to getting Nazi invocations, because, well, they're actually accurate." Skirvin goes on to caution against use of Nazi analogy with Neo-Nazis because, "it's not terribly original and they'll probably get off on it anyway." This seems to indicate that, at least from Skirvin's point of view, the Neo-Nazis are as cognizant of what it means to be compared to Nazis as anyone else is, except that their reaction to the insult is one of encouragement rather than outrage. They, too, understand what Nazis mean in dominant culture (even if it is a condition to which they are attracted rather than repulsed).

The existence of Godwin's Law suggests that participants in Internet communication understand what Nazis are, that whatever Nazis are, they are evil, that whatever is like the Nazis is evil as well, and that failure to understand these axioms indicates sympathies with Nazism and is, therefore, also evil. What it suggests, also, is that Nazism has taken on a folk value which is equivalent to evil and that widespread use of this value suggests that it is popularly recognizable—that one does not need to understand much about Nazis, their history or their politics, in order to accept their ethical equivalence to evil.

These same sentiments hold true for terms which are generally associated with Nazism including obvious terms like 'Final Solution,' 'genocide,' 'Auschwitz,' 'I was only following orders,' etc., and for less obvious but related terms like 'fascism' and 'nationalism.' In terms of how they are used, fascism and Nazism are almost interchangeable, rhetorically, such that, for instance, black nationalist and activist Angela Davis may speak of the American prison system as a tool for fascists resembling a concentration camp. Strangely enough, 'nationalism,' when used as a pejorative, implies a deviant loyalty to one's country akin to that of the Nazis and generally denoting terrorist-like sensibilities. The term 'nationalism' has, however, another complementary meaning which implies simply patriotism: its meaning depends wholly on its usage.

Instead, the equivalence between Nazism (and related terminology) and the ethical value of evil is based on current cultural values provided by sources like history, but also sources like blockbuster movies, television shows, comic books, the rhetoric of political and private organizations, and of course, the Internet. Moreover, as there are no other forms of Godwin's Law, no other laws pertaining to widespread equivalences with evil other than Nazism, Nazism's position as an equivalent to evil is unique. The evil of all

other acts or actors is relative to context. There is no law like Godwin's Law pertaining to extreme moral transgressions like rape or child molestation, for instance<sup>1</sup>. Finally, Godwin's Law covers the usage of Nazism specifically because it is an ethically stable position; on-line communicants use Nazism, and only Nazism, to dictate a moral position precisely because all other moral positions are up for debate. Indeed, what Godwin's Law suggests is that Nazism, and Nazism exclusively, is available to a wide audience as a description of evil for an ethical system wherein descriptions of evil are, otherwise, contestable and immediately unavailable through any agency other than through a comparison to Nazism.

Godwin's Law is itself a computerized version of the logical fallacy, *Reductio ad Hitlerum*, coined in 1953 by Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History*:

Unfortunately, it does not go without saying that in our examination we must avoid the fallacy that in the last decades has frequently been used as a substitute for the *reductio ad absurdum*: the *reductio ad Hitlerum*. A view is not refuted by the fact that it happens to have been shared by Hitler.

While Godwin's law may locate the logical fallacy for a computer age, Strauss's *reductio ad Hitlerum* suggests that the problems associated with comparisons to Nazism have plagued American ethics since the beginning of World War II. Strauss's fallacy has all the same implications as Godwin's Law but elevates them beyond the scope of cyberspace and into all of postwar American culture. As both Godwin's Law and the *reductio Ad Hitlerum* cite logical fallacies, both dictate a kind of argument that lacks cogency. Outside of concerns about appropriateness, however, the existence of these fallacies, and their special designation suggests a habitual dependence on Nazism as an epitome of evil within the ethics of American culture. The fallacy describes popular

usage precisely because the tendency to conflate Nazism and evil through epitome is widespread.

The frequency of this usage of Nazism demands investigation and analysis, as the ethics created through this system are indicative of the nature of a shared cultural value and the ethical beliefs it engenders. Namely, it suggests that American culture, like the participants in online discussions, is without stable ethics, and that Nazis, whatever they are in this system, provide stability in that they are always evil.

This ethical system is rife with paradoxes. American ethics create a presumably stable definition of evil through comparison to Nazism but its source for these Nazis is, itself, given to change from being evoked in a variety of disparate contexts. This practice of ethical evaluation through analogy is problematic also in that it resembles the method of ethical evaluation practiced by the Nazis themselves: historically, Nazis created their ethics by equating Jews with evil and then utilizing comparison—Bolshevists were, for instance, condemned as Judao-Boshevists. What does it suggest about those who make similar comparisons to those made by the Nazis except by using Nazism as the definition of evil? Does it matter that the subjects of comparison are Nazis rather than Jews? Are such comparisons inherently evil, or is this another instance of the *reduction ad Hitlerum* fallacy? Finally, the usage here is defined by its scope—Strauss suggests that the comparison is available and recognizable nationally, and in this way it suggests something about American national character, but exploration of national character in this manner has become passé and somewhat taboo. It runs dangerously close to the nationalism touted in Nazi ideology. The nation's ethical ambivalence (such that it requires Nazism as a comparative to empower its moral judgment) is partially a reaction

against fascist ethics (comparative ethics like those described by Godwin's Law and the *reduction ad Hitlerum* fallacy). Nazism's presence within America's ethics accentuates the inability of an anti-Nazi ethical system to escape Nazism as a comparative.

This study of Nazism as an ethical epitome is, then, a response to the growing belief that subjectivity and moral relativity is, first, possible, and, second, universally acknowledged as being better than belief in and reliance upon essentialist and immutable values. It is not, however, an endorsement of either. Instead, my work has two fundamental goals: the philosophical and the cultural. My philosophical goal is to illustrate three major points in this shift. First, this increase of skepticism concerning essentialist values comes from a particular historical break with essentialism (caused by the Nazi atrocities and the ideological philosophy that motivated those atrocities). Second, the subjective view put forward as an alternative to essentialist evaluation can not be sustained without reference to some fixed value (Nazism as evil). Third, a subjective system cannot help but alter, through overuse, the supposedly fixed value upon which it relies for evaluation (Nazism signifying evil but otherwise having no other fixed value or meaning). In essence, I'm providing reasons for the postwar shift in utopian and dystopian visions, from the conservative to the liberal, and arguing against the possibility for the moral subjectivity by showing how that subjectivity has ultimately undermined its own system of evaluation, allowing it to be replaced by nationalist virtue at best (a condition it hoped to replace) and total moral confusion at worst.

To illustrate these points, I explore the usage of Nazism as an ethical metaphor through two opposing critical lenses, Rorty's assertion of a liberal utopia empowered by



irony as an ideological tool and Baudrillard's opposite assertion of liberalism as dystopian through its association with simulation and the hyperreal.

The second goal of this work, its cultural goal, is to demonstrate how the national definition of ethics, culled from the revelation of the Nazi atrocities, have since shaped major foreign and domestic events in America. By describing a national definition of good, evil, right, wrong, the proper, and the improper, I necessarily shed new light on the underlying assumptions of American movements and events from such disparate subjects as the protests of anti-war demonstrators, the rhetoric of arm's buildup, the speeches of civil rights activists, the arguments concerning national health care, the justifications provided for the Red Scare, etc.

I do not see my two goals, the philosophical and the cultural, as separable. History bears out the philosophical and theoretical concerns that I address just as that same theory and philosophy is chosen precisely because of how easily it is suggested by the history. They are complementary such that the scope of the project requires an analysis of a fundamental American value system and the analysis on a fundamental value system demands the project's scope.

This leads naturally to assertions about the role assigned the United States through the process of its evaluations. However mythological the representation of Nazis become in these analogies, America's vision of itself in relation to the Nazis is unique: according to its national myth, America saved the world from the evils of Nazism. Thus these reminders of evil serve not only as a reminder of the Nazi's evil but also of America's virtue. Thus a study of Nazism as an ethical epitome within the culture of America is inherently guided by the philosophy of ethics and also the methodology of studies of

American culture. The first problem that must be faced is the manner in which Nazism's role creates shared national value and the way that his national value is to be reconciled, theoretically, with the contentious belief in studies of American culture that shared national value is the elitist, racist, sexist precursor to belligerent patriotism and nationalism. In general, this contention is characterized in studies of American culture by the reaction against a single unifying methodology as a symptom of a single unifying imperialistic and exclusive definition of an American experience.

In 1957, when Henry Nash Smith first posed his now canonical question: "Can American Studies Develop a Method," the answer was a celebratory "no." The study of American culture, past and present, as a whole, "requires its scholars to move across cultural and academic boundaries in order to cull together the subject for their study with the end result of questioning power structures like, for instance, a unified method" (Smith 197). Since Nash, the study of American culture has been defined by this lack of method with a greater and greater sense of celebration.

The inaugural speeches given by the various ASA presidents over the years, for example, have actively lionized the inability for the discipline to come together under one large methodological umbrella. Denise Radway in her 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association commented on the work now being done by American Studies by saying, "this new work has insisted on the importance of difference and division within American history, on the significance of "dissensus," in Sacvan Bercovitch's suggestive phrase" (2) Patricia Nelson Limerick, two years prior to Radway, offered in her friendly style, upon her inauguration into the ASA's presidential seat, that American studies is "the place of refuge for those who cannot find a home in

the more conventional neighborhoods, the sanctuary for displaced hearts and minds, the place where no one is fully at ease” (451). Michael Frisch, taking that same podium in 2000, offered, “Instead of focusing diversity into the laser's concentrated and powerful stream, the prism [as a model for cultural studies] deconstructs a beam into its constituent spectrum, allowing us to inquire into the composition, distribution, and relationships of its various components” (194). It is as if the study of American culture, so keen on disrupting monolithic social power structures, is obsessively afraid of becoming one itself.

To answer “yes” to Smith’s question, then, is the mark of scholarship working outside the discipline, and also strangely aligned with the spirit of dissonance upon which the discipline is built—an assertion of consensus is a refusal to cooperate with the scholars who refuse to cooperate. The idea of a single method has, however, always been part of the discipline’s description of itself, even when it became the mantel the discipline’s scholars refused to don—a definition in negative like defining goodness as the opposite of being like a Nazi. The discipline of American Studies has defined itself as an attempt to figure out the limits of America as a collection of cultural values, if only to celebrate complicating, or even the impossibility of locating, those boundaries. The problem of a method is part of the scholarly tradition precisely because it is so compelling.

As George Lipsitz points out in his essay, “In The Midnight Hour,” when our traditional views of space confront and disturb our notions of achieving social justice, “older narratives about national identity, citizenship, and subjectivity do not disappear...but they do become recontextualized in emerging understandings, ideas, and identities” (4). In supporting a method, then, I am both reopening the old debate and also

re-contextualizing it in the rhetoric that has followed since Nash. In particular, I am turning the American Studies argument against itself by offering that those scholars who operate under the assumption that there is no shared method are, themselves, utilizing that precise position as the shared starting point for all their methods. For them to be against method, then, is to accept a provisional, rather narrow, and ultimately unacknowledged definition of method. I am simply calling out their methodless method *as* a method, though in acknowledging it, I cannot help but invite complications so vigorous as to be self-denying.

For the success of this effort, then, I must appeal to a theoretical base which can encapsulate diametrically opposed theoretical positions to deal with a paradoxical method that is definitively against method. To put forward an argument about a unifying characteristic of the American experience, my analysis of American culture operates in the spirit of irony, as described by Richard Rorty, to provide a utilitarian position for cultural theory. His suggestion is that the absence of dogmatic truth—the belief that one idea or value is always correct or incorrect—taken to the level of belief structure, leaves only pragmatic value for what were once held as truisms.

If we could bring ourselves to accept the fact that no theory about the nature of Man or Society or Rationality, or anything else, is going to synthesize Nietzsche with Marx or Heidegger with Habermas, we could begin to think of the relation between writers on autonomy and writers on justice as being like the relation between two kinds of tools—as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars. (Rorty xiv)

Nothing for Rorty has Truth, but anything might become useful in context. Forwarding mutually exclusive ideas, then, does not result in a paradox because they are not forwarded as true—only helpful tools for understanding the world of human experience.

Irony, as Rorty describes it, is already an important feature in studies of American culture: thus, the divisiveness of the scholarship over a definition of America or the method to study it. But Rorty's irony also calls for an interrogation of the basic notion that the absence of method is a disciplinary necessity. Should the right need arise (the right subject need to be studied), it may prove useful to, instead, accept a disciplinary method, and accordingly, criteria for recognizing national character.

The use of Nazism as an ethical comparative in the nationally disseminated mass culture suggests a popular ethical system rooted in America's defeat of Nazi Germany. In this system, Nazism is seen as the epitome of evil, and the act of defeating Nazi Germany and, therefore, America's victory are seen as inherently Good. I am proposing that ethics rooted in this belief are culturally American and provide a common element in the rhetoric of ethics. Common acknowledgement of the Nazis as evil binds together the nation's various cultures into a single provisional culture and allows for an analysis of America's ethical character.

As what I'm describing is a "national narrative" (even if only in the particularly special case of post-World War II American ethics), I would like to emphasize the problems associated with this term in anticipation of the kinds of arguments I will necessarily have to make in its defense. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., in his description of the beginnings of the move away from the idea of national narrative in history states, "the exemplary works [of American Studies] have moved from stressing the American mind's basic homogeneity and uniformity of the American character to noting the diversity of the American population and divisiveness of the American experience" (589). Certainly American Studies now grants greater emphasis to notions of hybridity and the

decentralization of culture, but it is not altogether clear that all aspects of the American character are necessarily susceptible to this divisiveness.

Berkhofer describes a general prejudice against a unifying definition by replacing essentialist value with his term “contextual fundamentalism,” but his description otherwise betrays the original meaning that supposedly no longer serves.

At the heart of contextual fundamentalism is the premise that documents, artifacts, or texts are basically self-interpreting without recourse to any explicit framework. As practice, such an approach acts as if the text’s words or the artifact’s existence were determinative, that is conceptually coercive, of the “reading” they are to receive—regardless of the reader’s values, politics, interpretive paradigm, or interpretive community. Thus “facts” are discovered, not created or constituted by the frameworks that enable their existence. (Berkhofer 589)

Berkhofer, by using terms like “determinative” and “conceptually coercive,” clearly means foundational—a point of definition *in utero*. His description of contextual fundamentalism harkens to a point before the explication of text or the application of context—it is his name for essentialism. He cannot, however, escape the verbiage: he phrases the lack of context as a symptom of context by suggesting that meaning is coerced and that its context is a fundamental. Thus instead of meaning being a-contextual, as it is for an essential value, it is “contextually fundamental.” What is the context under consideration in this fundamentalism? Existence?

Berkhofer, locked in a context dependent evaluative mode is at odds to describe the evaluative modes that belong to other “contexts.” As Rorty points out,

“The trouble with arguments against the use of a familiar and time honored vocabulary is that they are expected to be phrased in that very vocabulary. They are expected to show that central elements in that vocabulary are ‘inconsistent in their own terms’ or that they ‘deconstruct themselves.’ But that can *never* be shown” (8)

Berkhofer wants to recognize essentialism in his argument but he can't do it because his language no longer will accept essentialism as anything but another context—a term that would, likewise, mean something else in an essentialist argument. The mistake is not, of course, just Berkhofer's to make, but represents an entire skewing of evaluation away from belief in essential truths and towards a reliance on explanatory contexts. The shift is so dramatic that the re-writing of intellectual history becomes inevitable. Sources once based on assumptions about transcendent truths are made to seem, because of alterations of language, to be supportive of a general skeptical position against such truths. Rorty, himself, in expressing his point, maintains that the British romantic movement was an attempt to change social context through the faculty of imagination (7). In suggesting this version of romanticism, he ignores the romantic belief, central to the argument of Walter Benjamin's assessment of art before the age of mechanical reproduction, that imagination also served as a tether between human faculties and higher forces. For Rorty, it's not so much that "the world is too much with us, late and soon," but rather that *this* world is too much with us (Wordsworth 515). In terms of American romanticism, the transcendental holds only political implications and loses all access to the spiritual. Enlightenment which was seemingly the goal of both Thoreau and Emerson<sup>2</sup>, is reduced to a better sense of citizenship because in context dependent evaluation, there is no other state to which they can be enlightened. The context of essentialism then becomes the hallmark of thinkers whose beliefs in evaluative systems have turned out to be naïve and essentially wrong.

I use the word 'essentially' here on purpose, because the error of believing in essential value, from this viewpoint, is essential—it's entirely based in a philosophy that

is wrong in its entirety because it is founded upon faulty principles. Those who believe in essential truth fail to understand, from the viewpoint of those who place their faith in evaluation through explanatory contexts, that all values are relative. Nominal axiomatic morality loses ground to the subjective, making claims about the nominal (and those who made them) false, accept that this exclusion requires the subjective, liberal, context dependent position to make a single, paradoxically axiomatic, claim: there is no nominal truth. This strange provision is resolvable only through the general climate of Rorty's irony which prevents total philosophical usurpation by allowing for exceptions in the name of utility.

Berkhofer's examination of contextual fundamentalism (what I call essentialism) hints that this same paradoxical process is also inherent to Nazism's role as an epitome of evil for postwar American ethics: as the ethics are dependent on the context in which they are explained, Nazism as an epitome is out of place, but as ethics require some nominal truth (some definition of evil) against which evaluations can be made, an epitome is needed for validation. The context dependent system allows for one nominally true position: Nazis are inherently evil. Notions of good and evil are conceptually coercive in ways that are no longer acceptable for a culture that prefers context dependency, but Nazism supplies an acceptable context for evil. However, when used ubiquitously for American ethics, the evil of Nazism ceases to be context dependent and becomes definitive. The occasion for contextualization becomes continuous and suffused throughout the culture's ethical system. Whatever is being compared to Nazism is necessarily compared to evil as well. In this way, Nazism becomes evil's epitome. When the statement's converse also becomes true (all accusations of evil are necessarily



comparisons to Nazism), the two terms become synonymous: evil and Nazism are the same thing.

Rorty's definition of irony allows room in American ethics for both concerns simultaneously: ethical evaluation that may be taken case by case, and an overarching, essential ethical force that creates value for all cases, but this implies the opposite use of irony from that which Rorty clearly intended. The point he makes through his analysis is that the introduction of context dependent evaluation into essential systems is necessary for the creation of what he calls a liberal utopia; "one in which ironism, in the relevant sense, is universal" through ubiquitous deconstruction—including the deconstruction of deconstruction (Rorty xv).<sup>3</sup> But if ironism is the position where one's beliefs are always provisional to the situation in which they are utilized, then there must always be a guard set up at the gates of this utopia. Some appeal must be made to another characteristic, efficiency for instance, to decide which belief works best for a particular situation.

This characteristic will have a methodology whether it is tautological or not. As Voltaire famously said, "if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him." The same is true for the arbitrating power of any meta-rhetoric. If one must decide, per situation, whether one should be an advocate of global citizenship or jingoist nationalism, like in the speech given by the Jewish barber at the end of Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, an appeal must be made to some value system. If no methodology presents itself immediately, it too will need to be invented. Chaplin, for instance, must, in his indictment of Nazism, focus on Hitler as a figure of brutality rather than of national prosperity—a delineation that is easier to support in 1940 than it would have been in 1934 when fascism could boast of ending Germany's economic freefall. Either way,

neither position is true in the sense that compassion is always more important than social stability, but rather is valued depending on its circumstances.

Rorty attempts to divorce this evaluation from outside reference to a world of value as a point of necessity in his rhetoric of irony.

“When the notion of ‘description of the world’ is moved from the level of criterion-governed sentences within language games to languages games as wholes, games which we do not choose between by reference to criteria, the idea that the world decides which descriptions are true can no longer be given clear sense” (Rorty 5).

This, however, can only serve to accentuate the function of value systems to decide between contested language games (meta-rhetoric, or the rhetorical system of rhetorical systems). If the world does not set in stone compassion as more important than social stability, then what system does? Obviously, the context for Chaplin’s speech is 1940 Germany. The depression is over and the Nazis are brutally oppressing German Jews. Such a value system must appeal to precedent and, at the same time, will need to become mythic in its instructive nature because no meta-meta-rhetoric to legitimate it. Though it is provisional, however, it cannot seem so or else lose its capacity to validate other provisional states. Chaplin declares compassion as the antithesis of Nazism and makes it seem eternally more important than all other conditions. In a sense, he performs a *reduction ad Hitlerum* which sets being like a Nazi as a mythical value signifying, and always signifying, evil.

In his analysis of the Myth and Symbol school of studies of American culture, Bruce Kucklick asserts, “Symbols and myths at best reflect empirical fact:” experience of the world acts as the final arbitrator (436). To use the above example, one may decide between a global citizenship and a belief in nationalist isolationism based on an idea

about greatest personal freedom for those involved, but then a provisional evaluative method will be needed to determine who is involved and how one measures personal freedom (and why personal freedom, after all?). These evaluative systems, too, will be dependent on the circumstances (context dependent) and will need another system to stand in judgment of each (and in judgment of each of those, and so on so long as the criteria are context dependent). The system is already susceptible to infinite recursion, and only becomes more complicated if the meta-evaluative systems contradict the evaluated systems (say, for instance, if a global citizenship criterion is used to validate jingoist nationalism rather than the spirit of globalization). In a universe of possibilities, the ad hoc philosophical positions are in danger of producing untenable evaluative statements, and even when tenable, no process of evaluation is self-terminating; without an essential value, it must always appeal to empiricism or to a higher authority (in his speech as the Jewish barber, Chaplin quotes from the gospel according to St. Luke).

Rorty points out that “the temptation to look for criteria is a species of a more general temptation to think of the world, or the human self, as possessing an intrinsic nature, an essence” (Rorty 6). Rorty’s suggestion is that the belief in an essence is the product of a misguided world view, but then it is only through an appeal to essence that the non-criteria based evaluative system can reach conclusions. Despite his assertion that essentialism and context dependency can both be employed, it is clear that, for Rorty, essentialism only works if phrased out of context (he phrases it as a value that is, paradoxically, context dependent).

Kucklick, in his critique of the humanist principles in early works within the discipline of American Studies, finds the exact opposite to be true. He writes that the

humanists “have no immediate way of determining which states of consciousness are ‘imaginative’ or ‘fantastic’ or ‘distorted’ or even ‘value laden’ for there is no standard to which the varying states of consciousness may be referred” (Kuklick 438). There is a similarity at the extremes in that the believers in an intrinsic self have no criteria by which to dispel their dualism (they are confused to determine which essential to use for a specific context), and Rorty, who professes against a belief in the essential self, disregards criteria as well because he cannot find an essential to determine validity for any particular language system. Rorty differs from Kuklick’s view of the humanists only in that he is celebratory—the lack of criteria isn’t a fault of the system but its predominant merit. The valueless world requires an infinitely open mind, and thus, the result is the liberal utopia espoused by Rorty and Chaplin’s Jewish barber.

In order to make delineations of value, however, one must supplement Rorty’s pragmatism with a methodology of evaluating pragmatics in order to construct the liberal utopia. As this methodology is both mythic and validated by empirical precedent, the utopian vision suffers the same concerns as elaborated by Warren I. Susman concerning the American intellectual’s use of historical narrative:

The myths are sufficient to unify the whole, to answer the largely emotional needs of the members of the community and to provide, when necessary, the collective dreams of the society about the past, the present and the future in the same instant. The myths “explain” all. The function of myth is largely utopian: it provides a vision of the future without providing in and of itself any essential dynamic element which might produce the means for bringing about any changes in the present order of things. (244)

Thus, Rorty’s liberal utopian vision is ultimately unattainable. In attempting to instigate such a vision, what becomes immediately apparent is how quickly the mythic position becomes totalizing and thus prevents irony. Satirists, too, employ the notion of a mythic

past to construct utopias, but as the moral precedent they employ to differentiate in the ironic mode is, for them, a product of nostalgia (a past with values that are no longer recognized), the result is dystopian—a future built on flawed present values.

When some appeal is made to decide which framework will decide the difference between the right way of thinking and the wrong way, it must be produced in accordance with experiences of the past and the un-ironic position is simply pushed back a step. For Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* as an appeal to a more liberal humanity with more open minds concerning the political climate of modernization relies completely on irony as Rorty understands it, but is absolutely un-ironic in that this irony is a reaction to the closed mindedness of the Nazis which Chaplin abhors.

The introduction of Myth, here, solves the most pernicious of problems associated with contextualized history as presented by Berkhofer. However deep his skepticism concerning contextual fundamentalism, Berkhofer's analysis is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's, especially as it concerns authenticity as the result of a capacity for historical testimonial—the effect that the story of history has on the authenticity of the historical event. Berkhofer writes:

Such an approach to contextualism [contextual fundamentalism] postulates at bottom that a historical narrative is verified in its essential structure by its parallel in past reality. In the end the variant versions or interpretations could—and should—be reconciled as constituting a single (hi)story from a single viewpoint of presentation told by a single voice. This understanding of the past as the “Great Story” presumes that all the various documents and artifacts can—and should—be “woven” into some sort of overall story. (Berkhofer 590)

Berkhofer's protests are not that a historical narrative has an essential structure but that it is verified according to its ability to achieve a single essential story about the past (in this way, he is opposite of Benjamin who sees this as history's one authentic characteristic).

For Berkhofer, the single voice story misrepresents history whereas a multi-vocal version would be preferable. The difference of values is based on essential criteria: his point is that contextual fundamentalism (essentialism) needs to be abandoned because it is essentially wrong. His prejudice of language indicates skepticism towards all values determined by modes other than contextualization. History bears no essential truth; it is just a story (and a story is a kind of history). Berkhofer chides the idea that multiple threads of narrative can be reconciled by setting off the word “woven” with quotation marks (thus marginalizing its meaning to irony and the superstitions of a woe begotten age before this mystique-free era of American Studies). Regardless, to describe the philosophical drift towards subjectivity and pluralism requires that he acknowledge the very characteristic, essence, which he hopes to refute.

Despite his prejudices against essentialism, however, his ultimate point is that the things of history are actually concerns, not of the past, but of the present. History is not the thing that happened; it is the story we tell about the thing that happened: the myth (the inauthentic myth according to Benjamin). In reality, even the event lacks the power of verification since there’s no guarantee that the witnesses of history will remain alive to tell what really happened and no guarantee that their story will be what really happened should they have survived to tell it.

For the cultural critic, the real purpose of history is to analyze it as if it too were a kind of story being told in the present—a modern day rendition of a past event told as a kind of period piece. Thus, the stories told about Nazis are less important for their creating a kind of historical verity but rather for their capacity to tell us about the culture that chooses to tell stories about the Nazis and the values of that culture that they tell the

stories in this way. Chaplin's Hynkel isn't a caricature of the Hitler of Nazi Germany, but the Hitler of Nazi Germany as America imagines the place. The image of the Nazi, so seemingly rooted in history, becomes a kind of Rorschach test for America's ethical psyche. That Hynkel is historically inauthentic wouldn't matter to Berkhofer—Hynkel is authentic to a different evaluative system based on mass cultural desires.

What views of history like Berkhofer's cannot account for, however, is that if history is used by the culture to generate epitome, then the culture does not hold its belief as *just* a belief. It is a belief that is held to be true, and is thus promoted to the position of myth. America believes that Nazis are the ultimate evil precisely because they are the ultimate evil...according to the American myth. What such a belief ultimately becomes is a cultural construct (which allows for analysis and evaluation like that described by Berkhofer), a truism (insofar as it can be evaluated according to analytical criteria for truisms), and an aberration (insofar as it is inauthentic, in the sense implied by Benjamin, and likely to result in the corruption of transcendent value). This kind of belief necessitates a theoretical position that operates in the ironic mode as myth and, in doing so allows for criteria of evaluation of context dependent systems even though it too is a context dependent evaluative systems (masquerading as an essential characteristic).

To give a rather obvious example of all this, if we imagine an attempt to look at Nazi Germany through a critical lens, we might note immediately how dangerous the multi-cultural viewpoint, in particular, becomes for such an evaluation; while it is fine to think of every culture as having a right to express itself and hold its own beliefs despite the fact that they might run counter to the dominant culture, giving respect to genocidal psychopaths simply ought not to be justified by an appeal to cultural sovereignty.

According to Rorty, irony allows us to maintain the tenets of multiculturalism despite the contradiction; we simply have to agree that there are better frameworks to be used in this particular situation. But what does “better” mean exactly? According to Rorty, better refers to the path leading to the liberal utopia, but how does one decide which framework is more or less likely to lead to the liberal utopia? Irony was supposed to guide this journey, but irony fails to answer questions about how to choose between the differing views which irony has produced.

It is ironic when a multiculturalist recognizes the limit of multiculturalism in dealing with Nazism and chooses another viewpoint, but how is that limit recognized except with an appeal to some value system developed empirically (and therefore through the past and history) and above context. One must succumb to the kind of skepticism voiced centuries ago by Montaigne: “For that Academic inclination, and that leaning toward one proposition rather than another, what else is it but the recognition of some more apparent truth in this one than in that?” (422). In any case, if such a value system is appealed to in order to determine when there is need for Rorty’s ironic sensibility, then isn’t that value system free of irony? If the multiculturalist determines that Nazi culture needn’t be respected because they were dangerous then doesn’t this suggest some independent system, like Montaigne’s appeal to “apparent truth” which divides the dangerous from the harmless? What suggestion is there at all that this irony-free evaluative system will lead to Utopia? Eventually, the only conclusion that can be reached is that we do not want to offer respect to the culture of tyrants, but once we have made that decision, irony as it is presented by Rorty becomes impossible. We cannot both make truisms and deny



them; if the conditional is constantly present then the evaluation isn't conditional but tautological.

We have made a rule that is not context dependent, but is inherent and based on our 'understanding of things.' The conundrum becomes only more complicated once we acknowledge that myths change. According to Warren I. Susman, "there is also a drive to make the myth something historically real; that is, to turn the utopian promise into a specific kind of ideology" (Susman 247). What must we do with the Nazis, for instance, that live only in popular culture (Nazis in movies, for instance) when they too describe the U.S.'s understanding of the Nazi as an epitome of evil? An understanding of how ethical epitome operates within a context dependent framework is absolutely necessary in order to understand the limits of irony.

What irony does, in the general case, is allow for statements to be made about a unified American culture while still acknowledging the prominence of cultural plurality and contextual dependent evaluation. In the specific case of this argument, it allows the procession of an investigation into a system that is likewise rooted in both the essential and the context dependent: namely the system of post-World War II American ethics as they are distributed by mass culture and absorbed by the national population.

The questions I am attempting to answer with this study center around the use of an epitome (an essential value) within a system which is dependent on context (and that does not, therefore, value epitome). Does America's mythical self image as the defeater of worldwide fascism resemble the Nazi narrative in that it too constructs an inherent national virtue? Does the use of Nazism in this manner suggest contextual value, and if it isn't context dependent then how does it persist and operate in a system that employs

context dependent values? If it is context dependent, what does that mean about Nazi villainy and the ethical systems that rely upon that definition?

Obviously, these questions rely on the ability to move back and forth across the borders of the essential and contextual—thus, the need for irony, but irony only serves to make such arguments possible. The problem remains of how to deal with the Nazi's existence in postwar American Culture as a thing that is simultaneously contextual, presumed tautological, and able to validate contextually dependent ethics according to its presumed essential state. Irony may describe this problem but it cannot, ultimately, provide a solution. Myth constructs a didactic position from artifice, and as such, allows for a reading of the effect of mass produced Nazis throughout American culture. But myth excludes the ironic mode through dogmatism, even as it exemplifies it by presenting a culturally embedded (and, therefore, context dependent) value as an immutable (and, therefore, essential) truth.

What is needed then is a supplemental theoretical position that describes specifically the interplay between the fluidity of context dependent evaluation and the seeming stability of appeals to essential values (like Nazism as the epitome of evil). As the constructed Nazi takes the place of the real Nazi in American ethics, it is marked, ultimately, as a simulation of an historical Nazi that then ceases to exist (either in the world or in the imagination). Whatever place the real historical Nazi might have had in the mass audience's intellectual and moral life is replaced by this simulacrum.

Benjamin describes the persistence of simulacrum as the conveyance of history through testimony, but he only posits that it is through the lack of authenticity of the testimony that the authenticity of the history is endangered, and the collapse of

transcendent value through the dissolution of this authenticity. Jean Baudrillard takes Benjamin's positions a step further by marking the inundation with simulation in American culture as a shift in foundational terms of causality—real things are now produced through unreal pre-figurations: unreal cause produces real effect. Hynkel and his descendents create history, and not the other way around. He calls this causal relationship the “hyperreal.”

The repercussions revealed by his analysis seem apropos for representations of the Nazi as the position of historical information about real Nazis has otherwise been usurped through mass reproduction of the image of Nazis. The Nazi is, for Americans, the creature created in Saturday matinees, newsreels, comic books, Holocaust films, and so forth. Their essential evil is designed for mass consumption.

According to Baudrillard, creations for mass consumption are as likely to be constructed in previous fabrications as they are on concrete reality. Thus, the amalgamation that is the image of a Nazi is constructed from other images present in previous media, in previous propaganda and even in second hand accounts of history: it is a hodge podge of cultural detritus (high and low) pieced together to make the villain, which lacks any real (or at least a reality that can be acknowledged as such) Nazi against which this hyperreal Nazi might be compared for accuracy, there is no force outside of shared cultural value that can invalidate the image. Lacking comparison, the constitution of the Nazi “no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance” (Baudrillard 2). It has surpassed its substantive duration in Benjamin's terms and the simulation is, now, all that exists—its accuracy

becomes a case of propriety rather than verity: how does the image jibe, not with historical truth, but with other images?

The hyperreal as a critical framework is vital to understanding representations of Nazism and their placement within culture because it implies the repercussions discussed by Baudrillard in demoting real to simulation. It supplements Benjamin by producing a hyperreal version of authenticity—authentic to historical testimonial and not to historical event. If American culture has become nostalgic for a period of time when a sense of reality was indisputable, then its interest in Nazism (and thus the ubiquity of representations of Nazism) is explainable through Baudrillard’s position on culture, simulation, and history. As with Susman, Baudrillard also sees a mythology as being integral to a teleological view of American culture. Baudrillard, however, clearly sees as the myth’s most important component, its capacity to remain, not just topical, but experiential. It is a story about the past, but it functions as an element of the present. “We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end” (Baudrillard 10). Mythology becomes an image of itself—a past reproduced in simulation and constructed in order to make the passage towards Susman’s utopian vision constantly a thing of the present moment. In literature, Susman sees this immanence as an obsession with mythology that contravenes history as knowledge and reproduces it as an empirical phenomena: “Many of our newer literary vogues—some of them brilliantly evocative of major moral dilemmas of our time to be sure—are deliberately wedded to the present moment alone” (Susman 261). His assumption is that, in such a wedding, “we are left with a mythic past, an anxious present and an anti-utopian, Orwellian future” (Susman 262). Susman sees the demystification of the mythic

by the writers of his time (roughly, 1940-1960) as a project against ideology. “In these works we look in vain for a vision of the past that will enable us to remake the present and the future. Here ideology is specifically rejected” (Susman 261). He seems to be working in the same vein of Nietzsche’s vision of radical history, from *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History For Life*, in which the past is mined specifically to fuel revolution, but for Susman, this revolution is non-ideological and not simply counter-ideological.

Baudrillard’s position seems to be far less dialectical. For Baudrillard, the construction of the dystopia is not the process of removing moral structure, but rather the reaffirmation of a structure that has become a simulated version of itself in order to disguise ethical collapse. “Formerly one worked to dissimulate scandal—today one works to conceal that there is none” (15). What has presented itself as scandal is simply the order of the day; if it is Orwellian, then it is Orwellian without the critical view of Winston Smith to alert us to the inconsistencies of Ingsoc; if it is inauthentic, then we cannot turn to Benjamin to learn that what passes for authenticity is a sham.

But Ingsoc is a poor example for the apathy engendered by the hyperreal as the “party” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an edifice for which Baudrillard does not allow, and which represents a major divergence between Susman and Baudrillard’s sense of the utility of history and myth. In a hyperreal model, “a single fact can be engendered by all models at once” and as such prevents the dominance of any particular ideology: no edifice, no monolith, just an endless precession of equally valid causes, all vying for cogency and all canceling each other out (16). It is this holistic feature of truth, as present in simulation, that validates all discourses simultaneously (in doing so, it also drowns out

particulars of validation)—and it is this simultaneous validation that requires some model for deciding between competing values (Rorty’s conception of Irony). In the hyperreal, there simply is no anti-ideological position—only an infinite number of ideological models with equal claims to validity and cause. According to Baudrillard, an inability to decide between competing explanatory models forces the ambiguous discourse “to desire its own repression and to invest in paranoid and fascist systems” (18). Context dependent philosophy’s inability to self-terminate produces infinite evaluative systems, effects without causal truth, and “discourse that is no longer simply ambiguous, as political discourses can be, but that conveys the impossibility of a determined position of power, the impossibility of a determined discursive position” (Baudrillard 17). The hearkening towards fascism, towards a system that makes definite evaluations and insists on essential causal relationships is a form of nostalgia that reproduces itself as hyperreal into a real manifestation—a real effect with an unreal cause.

Baudrillard’s reading of culture, his conception of the hyperreal, is then a direct negotiation of evaluative systems—either context dependent or dependent upon transcendent value—which he sees as having a direct effect on the ethical systems simulated. Rorty provides an optimistic profile for the competition between language systems; Baudrillard does not. For Baudrillard, disagreement can never be resolved as the past provides no precedent, the future does not depend on the present, and the present itself is a construction of a hyperreal past. Philosophical disputes remain in dispute. All are equally valid—all equal in their capacity to explain phenomena: what criteria, then, judges between them?

What Baudrillard fails to address is that, as with any hyperreal phenomena, construction proceeds from a model and not from an existent. “Need” then, is a kind of model. Necessity, within the framework described by Baudrillard, can again resume her role as the mother of invention. If a criteria is needed to explain between equally valid causes, then one may easily be constructed. As such a construction is necessarily hyperreal (all things are hyperreal in this context), it requires no precedent: “it travels all discourses without them wanting it to” (17). What is needed is a discourse which decides between equally verifiable (and, therefore, equally valid) discourses of cause; that discourse is the image system of the hyperreal Nazi.

For Baudrillard, the proliferation of the Nazi’s representation is simply a form of nostalgia. Its ubiquity within mass culture is presented as related to its manifestation as a fetish—both in its religious and sexual connotation. He cedes to this fetishization the “the omnipresence of fascism and of war in retro” seeing the fascination with fascism less as an irreconcilable position between hyperreal values than as another instance of the hyperreal stripping away the aura of the real (and the horrible).

“[It is a] coincidence, an affinity that is not at all political; it is naïve to conclude that the evocation of fascism signals a current renewal of fascism (it is precisely because one is no longer there, because one is in something else, which is still less a musing, it is for this reason that fascism can again become fascination in its filtered cruelty, aestheticized by retro.”  
(Baudrillard 44)

His reading of cinema’s role in this representation is no less pessimistic: “History thus made its triumphal entry into cinema, posthumously...Its reinjection has no value as conscious awareness but only as nostalgia for a lost referential” (45). Thus, the period of the Second World War and that decade preceding it, for Baudrillard, is an era before the age of the hyperreal. All desires for the real hearken back to it, but only in ways

corrupted by their character as simulacra. Reconstructions of the era are then made from a model, but a model without real authenticity (the authenticity of the real). He does not suggest that the model can differentiate between other models: the hyperreal is characterized by its indeterminacy and lack of character.

Baudrillard places the onus of evaluation, instead, on the individual. It is the individual that must bear witness to the mechanisms of the hyperreal, and in bearing witness, cease to play a passive role in the system. Adjudication, even at the role of popularizing, is, itself, participation. “‘YOU are the model!’ ‘YOU are the majority!’ Such is the watershed of a hyperreal sociality, in which the real is confused with the model, as in the statistical operation, or with medium...” ( Baudrillard 29). As with Rorty, however, the means of participation seems to be balanced on intuition. How does one know how to decide between hyperreal models? How does one keep from suffering an existential dilemma resulting in total stasis? Baudrillard does not elaborate except to evoke a capitalist ethos, but then, why validate a capitalist ethos over some other evaluative system? They are all plainly just simulations: “In the absence of real syntax of meaning, one has nothing but the tactical values of a group in which are admirably combined” (Baudrillard 46). It is not clear why they are to be admirably combined, nor is it clear why one should choose that particular group’s values over some other.

If instead of accepting Baudrillard’s evaluation as totalizing, if it is, in short, seen as a tool in Rorty’s ironic sense, then one may answer questions concerning modes of differentiation. Applying Rorty’s idea of irony by applying the tenants of the hyperreal to the hyperreal itself, one can read the hyperreal as itself a simulation. As Baudrillard cannot account for a “real” history or thereby refute his position through internal



inconsistency, he must bear witness to the construction of the past as a simulation (and in bearing witness, participate).

The move away from essential truths and towards context dependent evaluative systems implies historical basis for the hyperreal as a mode arising out of needs to change behavior from models of utopia. Thus, one needs to envision the change in order to produce it, and often in the face of historical precedent. If one wants to change, for instance, attitudes about race, one must provide a model for the different attitude—especially if such a model does not already exist except as a myth. The goal, then, is to construct from that myth a real improvement. Construction from the myth is, then, necessary, but as it is a myth, it dooms the attempted construction of the real to the hyperreal.

Baudrillard cannot acknowledge this historical vantage point because it points to a model for models and establishes causality. His vision of the hyperreal seems to emerge from the vacuous indefinitude of culture and eradicates all traces of its origin in the hyperreal plurality of cause. His model for this is clearly the Holocaust:

“Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc. This forgetting is as essential as the event, in any case unlocatable by us, inaccessible to us in its truth. This forgetting is still too dangerous, it must be effaced by an artificial memory. (49)

If one acknowledges this vantage point, it is clear that this model for models is, itself, largely utopian and ethical. Models are created that point to a better world and real (hyperreal) phenomena are created from those models.

This re-examination of the hyperreal does not deny its repercussions. Questions still linger. For instance, if there is a model that decides between models, what is it modeled

on? If the manifestation is initially modeled on utopia, does it matter that it has the character of the hyperreal rather than the real: is a simulated utopia different than a real utopia? How can one tell the difference?

The answers to these questions are indicated within the examination of nostalgia by which Baudrillard, ironically enough, dismisses Nazism. If nostalgia is the attempt to imagine a real (and thus to construct a hyperreal reality), then though the model for the real is hyperreal, it is nonetheless a model (and immediately recognizable as such or else it wouldn't inspire nostalgia but satisfaction).

Thus, when the culture becomes nostalgic for the era of fascism, it is attempting to recall the real, though what it recalls is simulacra. The image system surrounding the Nazi is the production of this nostalgia and acts as the seemingly real, seemingly essential ethical value by which other seemingly real ethical statements may be judged as to their capacity for utopia (which is equivalent to their capacity to be unlike Nazism). What remains to be discussed, then, is the repercussions implied by this delineator's obvious hyperreal character: what it means when, in summoning up an image of real evil, the tendency is to think of fake Nazis. What does it mean that the system deciding between hyperreal systems is itself embedded within the framework of the hyperreal?

Arguably, the delicacy with which deconstruction of Nazism must proceed already reveals the ethical position of essential evil held by Hitler and his minions in the American imagination. Deconstructing Nazism as a simulation and its reflective patriotism is to skirt the cell of the revisionist historian and to question values that Americans hold sacred. The use of cultural theory in relation to Nazis runs the problem of intellectualizing a rather basic belief that Nazis are evil and that, in some way,

analyzing that evil will detract from its impact. The fear is that cultural theory, when applied, will justify Nazism or remove the onus of responsibility from the Nazis themselves; either position may suggest why an analysis of context dependency and Nazism has not been forthcoming in the six decades following the end of World War II. It also suggests why Godwin's Law can accurately predict that a conversation which evokes Nazism has ended any rational discourse and reverted to on-line mud slinging.

What should be clear, however, is that what is not being deconstructed here are the actual Nazis themselves, Nazi Germany, or any other things with historical veracity, but rather the images produced of these things, the hyperreal versions derived from the codes burned into the imagination by the very real atrocities. The real counterpart to the hyperreal image system is inaccessible given this species of analysis. Arguably, mythicizing the past is as ethically troubling as denying, but if this is so then more deeply troubling is our incapacity to know the past except through myths. Isn't it better to know the stakes of corruption, if such a corruption is inevitable, then to deny corruption altogether for the sake of nostalgia? If our confused definitions of evil have, too, become meaningless in their hyperreal character, then we must see the ethics founded upon our definition of evil as based in the villainy of Nazism as another casualty of our war with Nazi Germany.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM HUN TO HOLOCAUST: AMERICA'S DEPICTIONS OF NAZISM BEFORE AND AFTER CAMP LIBERATION

America's postwar beliefs about the Nazis did not build only upon the evidence of their atrocities at war's end. They were constructed from the America's understanding of Nazism and dystopian ideology from the interwar years combined with its anti-Nazi wartime propaganda campaign. Nazis had been vilified during the war, before the revelation of their attempted genocide, and before public understanding of the Holocaust as we understand it now<sup>4</sup>.

The postwar vilification of Nazism modified beliefs already in place to accentuate differences between America and Germany, which absolved the U.S. of its resemblance to the Nazi state. Over the decades following the war, the tension between what America understood about the Nazis and what it had to explain through that understanding would result in a redefinition of Nazism that matched its understanding of Nazism as evil, even as that definition threatened national self-image.

Wartime beliefs were built upon the prior peacetime beliefs of the interwar period, and these, in turn, were derived in reaction to the wartime beliefs of World War I. As Jean Francois Baudrillard posits, what is thought of as Nazi Germany, now, is informed by a long precession of simulacra—depictions of Nazis by the American news and media—making the “real” Nazi now in use for comparisons the hyperreal next step to these depictions. The current validity of these depictions can only be measured against the previous models upon which they were based. Thus, the definition of Nazism is inclined to become what the culture desires of it rather than remain confined to a

definition decided by historical veracity. The culture, prior to the war, was ill-informed of the dangers presented by Nazi Germany and so it constructed a definition of Nazism based primarily on its own concerns. Nazi Germany became a nation that, like America, was afraid of outside forces because it believed that foreign corruption could threaten its traditional and national values. Unlike America, however, the Nazis had turned their fear of liberalism into justification for global imperialism. They didn't just close their doors against their world; they attacked their neighbors in an attempt to subjugate them.

America worried about issues of immigration, the dangers of communism, and the ravages of economic depression. It preferred depictions of Nazism defined by these factors. America was not, by and large interested in issues of racial tolerance or the plight of the Jews, and so these issues were less associated with the Nazis by the American mass media. Perhaps the best account of this coverage is Robert Abzug's *America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945*, which surveys the various stories concerning Nazi Germany and its anti-Semitic politics. The survey demonstrates that many prewar news outlets, sympathetic to the plight of Jews, reported on the brutality in Germany when they could, but just as commonly, other news outlets, sympathetic to the Nazis, ran stories that subverted the tales of violence to propaganda by the Jewish and anti-German communities.

The roots of American opinion concerning Nazism began as an extension of what Americans thought about Germans during and after the First World War. During that war, America ran a propaganda campaign against Germany as its foe which presented the German enemy as marauding Huns. Where the British were depicted as reserved and

decent, the Germans were made to seem flamboyant, rude, and above all, brutal. The Germans were brutally imperialistic, regimented, and out for world domination.

At the end of the First World War, the antipathy towards Germany cooled to reserved apathy, which then spread to America's attitudes regarding the rest of Europe as well. American bohemians may have gone to France and Italy to drink coffee and begin literary careers, but for most Americans, Europe was a strange place that started wars for no good reason, had too many nations filled with people who obeyed strange customs and cultures, and who, all too often, wanted to immigrate. Many Americans viewed Europe as a breeding ground for extreme ideologies like Fascism, anarchy, Socialism, and Bolshevism. The open letter from Lenin to the American Worker in 1918 and the ensuing Palmer raids of 1920 — which had led to the deportation 246 men and 3 women<sup>5</sup> to Russia — had originally created the image of the Bolshevik as a foreign-born political radical indistinguishable from an anarchist (Barson 19).

In a 1920 letter meant to counter Lenin's, Palmer explains the nature of communism as criminal:

Robbery, not war, is the ideal of Communism. This has been demonstrated in Russia, Germany, and in America. As a foe, the anarchist is fearless of his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect of any other creed. Obviously it is the creed of any criminal mind, which reasons always from motives impossible to clean thought. Crime is the degenerate factor in society...An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish. (174).

What Palmer also suggests is that he couldn't distinguish between the strike-inciting communist and the bomb throwing anarchist. His description is indicative of the prewar

conception of the communist: a robber, an assassin, an orator, but not a tyrant, a hypnotist, or a power-mad imperialist.

The first Red Scare, which reached its political zenith in 1919 and 1920, was located in the heart of American isolationism. For instance, in 1920, Stoddard published his extremely popular eugenic work against immigration entitled *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* in which he argues, “Unless man erects and maintains artificial barriers, the various races will increasingly mingle, and the inevitable result will be the supplanting or absorption of the higher by the lower” (301). Stoddard’s views were echoed culturally by the revitalization of the Ku Klux Klan that same year, after its reorganization in 1915 under leader William Joseph Simmons. Much of the Klan’s resurgence owed to the Red Scare (“William Allen White” 284). 1920 also saw the arrests of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco for robbery and murder, a case that would polarize the nation up until their execution in 1927. The 1921 inaugural address of Warren G. Harding promised a “return to normalcy” which constituted America’s retreat from foreign affairs and a promotion of America’s problems and issues before attempting to intercede in the affairs of Europe (“Warren G. Harding”). From 1920 until the beginning of the Second World War, the subject of immigration and immigration reform would be the focus of heated national; the inability of displaced Europeans to find refuge in America during the ’30s had its roots in American xenophobia.

The effect of the first Red Scare was native to the American desire for isolation following the First World War. Even after Palmer’s political career ended (leaving Herbert Hoover in control of the FBI), anti-Communist sentiments continued to affect national policy. The victorious nations of the First World War, for instance, encouraged

fascist nationalists<sup>6</sup> to compete for power in vulnerable nations because of their inherent anti-Bolshevist attitudes (Hobsbawn 31). The House Un-American Committee, set up in 1934 to investigate Nazi propaganda, changed three years later to look at the danger of communist infiltration.

The after-effect of the First World War was that America otherwise recoiled from foreign elements and began to entertain xenophobia as a general social and political policy; they called this sentiment 'isolationism'. Often, attitudes towards foreign immigrants were generalized from encounters with alien radicals who had been forced out of their home countries for political reasons and who found themselves in America attempting to indoctrinate and sabotage<sup>7</sup>. Just as often, attitudes towards immigration were based on racism. Many Americans associated Jews with communism just as the Nazis would, and saw an influx of refugees as an importing of Bolshevism. Others opposed immigration of German refugees for reasons of simple racism: they did not want America to import Europe's 'Jewish problem.'

Though Palmer and his tactics would eventually be denounced first by the ACLU and then by the House Rules Committee, the feelings of anti-Communism, and anti-immigration would continue throughout the decade of the 1920s and to a lesser degree, the 1930s. When Benito Mussolini and his fascists took control of their government and kicked the Bolsheviks out in 1922, they earned the respect of most of the Western powers and defined a political dichotomy that would continue until the Second World War: fascism as an ideology that prevented communism. America could not follow the same course as the fascists because it espoused democratic principles and concerns about



individual rights, but many Americans saw an intuitive wisdom to the fascist approach and even envied it for its ability to deal with social issues directly<sup>8</sup>.

The rise of Fascism, and even the rise of Bolshevism, however, paled in significance to the country's severe economic collapse. In 1929, when the Great Depression hit America, rampant poverty and unemployment at home became far more pressing than any other issue, domestic or foreign, and immediately more important than the affairs of old Europe.

During that time, extremist groups stepped up to answer the clarion call to rescue America from its troubles. Communism, for instance, grew in influence despite a decade of having been demonized (later, in the late 40s and early 50s, those who attended communist meetings were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to explain themselves). Rallies and marches were common among the unemployed and disenfranchised of America looking for hope or someone to blame—a situation mirrored in many other countries around the world including Germany.

In America, the 1920s saw the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, the discussion of eugenics in respectable medical journals<sup>9</sup>, and the rise of well received investigations concerning the dangers of miscegenation<sup>10</sup>. The conditions that led to the rise of Nazism in Germany, then, were not so different than those of America except in degree. Americans, like Germans, needed jobs and food. Neither brown-shirted men marching down the street promising both nor racist demagogues with master plans were odd enough to have made Germany's nationalist movement stand out from America's.

In Germany, the parades and demonstrations resulted in Hitler who claimed to be able to end the violence, to get people jobs, and to renew the strength of the nation. In

America, economic turmoil allowed for FDR and his WPA projects—his critics called these projects socialist. Hitler promised to pull his nation out of the Great Depression, and as far as public opinion was concerned, he succeeded<sup>11</sup>. What Hitler had done in the eyes of the world was to save Germany from economic ruin and to purge his nation of communism and socialism. He had, in effect, achieved for his nation the very ends that most Americans hoped for theirs.

Though the Nazis were brutal and hated Jews, they made good on their promises concerning employment. Moreover, the grim passion of the Nazi statesmen wasn't particularly dissimilar to what any American would have seen from their own orators. American politicians were equally practiced at grandstanding messages of blatant racism, and unlike their German counterparts, most American statesmen had proven ineffective at dealing with the Depression. Belligerent political posturing was simply the interwar manner of campaigning in America, and if Americans accepted such theatrics (more precisely, hysterics) as harmless from their politicians, why should they have assumed anything different about Hitler? They had learned not to take such invectives too seriously<sup>12</sup>.

In fact, it was criticism of Hitler, not praise, which was regulated in the American popular media until the beginning of the forties, first by the Production Code Association and then by various state departments. Political cartoons against the Nazis existed in abundance, but there were very few theatrical films made about the dangers or evils of fascism. The regulators of the film industry did not want to risk foreign markets by making anti-Nazi movies<sup>13</sup>. Obviously, some media giants like Charlie Chaplin had the

clout to make films condemning Hitler anyway, but Chaplin did so at great risk, and not until 1940. For most movie studios Hitler and the other great dictators were off limits<sup>14</sup>.

America's literati by the 1930s had become disillusioned with Europe and concentrated instead on troubles at home<sup>15</sup>. Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) about fighting against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, but the subject of Nazism was never explored in much detail during the thirties by any prominent American writers.

When Hitler began annexing countries in Europe, there was some cause for American concern, of course, but then England and France didn't seem too overly distressed by Germany's expansion. Even when Hitler began to rearm, the world of Europe seemed nonplussed that the treaty of Versailles had become meaningless. In actuality, worldwide depression had made answering the threat of Germany a more difficult task than had been anticipated at the signing of the treaty, but as far as most Americans were concerned, if England didn't care, they needn't either. Nazi Germany, if it was a problem, was Europe's problem.

Stories of Nazi brutality were inescapable during the 1930s, but Americans were at odds to know what to think of them. Though they were publicized with great zeal by the foreign and even by the German press, stories of socialists being put into camps could not have won popular sympathy from Americans who hated socialism and bolshevism far more than Nazism or fascism. In any case, the threat of Bolshevism in Nazi Germany was presented as grave: they were accused, after all, of having burned the Reichstag.

Stories about Nazi mistreatment of Jews emerged with great frequency as well, in both the secular and religious presses<sup>16</sup> but the American public had difficulty believing them at their word. Newspapers, after all, exaggerated; America had fought the Spanish

American war because of “Yellow Journalism.” What’s more, eyewitness reports of the Nazi brutalities were often rebuffed by conflicting viewpoints in other papers and by other media personalities including media celebrities like Father Coughlin whose invectives against a world-wide Jewish conspiracy were extremely popular. According to Robert H. Abzug, “By 1938, [Coughlin] had become the most powerful and popular purveyor of anti-Jewish propaganda in the nation” (77).

When foreign cameras came into Germany for the 1936 Olympics, Berlin presented a notoriously sanitized version of itself to the world, making reports of street-level terror seem unrealistic. Throughout his reign, the Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, was infamous for leaking fake stories to the world press and then demanding retractions because of the baseless information that he himself had secretly disseminated (Birdwell 14).

Even when the stories of Nazi atrocities were believed, it wasn’t always clear that the acts of violence were organized. Within Germany’s national borders, many Jews saw the brutality as acts of extremism by party members, and not necessarily the result of party line; once Hitler felt secure in his position, they believed, he would put an end to the random acts of violence against Jews (*The World at War, A New Germany*). Hitler had, after all, eliminated the most radical elements from his party when he murdered the leadership of the SA<sup>17</sup>. This suggested that the revolutionary days of the Nazis were behind them, and that some of its younger members just hadn’t settled yet into their role as members of a national party that no longer needed revolution to have its demands met.

Jewish refugees in America were, of course, in a very good position to verify the accuracy and nature of the anti-Semitic violence since they had, generally, immigrated to

escape it, but of course, their oppression in Nazi Germany had begun with their being singled out as Jews; they were in no hurry to repeat the process in their new American home. Assimilation was, foremost, a very important goal<sup>18</sup>. For others, the goal was immigration to Palestine, and changing the attitudes of Americans seemed unimportant. At the same time, Jewish immigrants were aware of their friends and family left behind in Nazi Germany and the nations threatened by that country. Stirring up trouble against Germany in America meant making things worse for German Jews. When Americans attempted to organize boycotts of German products, the movements went, by and large, unsupported by the American Jewish community. In any case, during the '30s, Jewish emigration from Europe was made as difficult as possible by politicians with isolationist sentiments and even by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who would not risk the power base of Southern Democrats whose votes tended towards isolationism<sup>19</sup>.

Explaining a lack of outrage by the American public through the silence of the Jewish community is not meant to exonerate Americans of their racism—merely to point out that there were many factors other than racism that kept America from understanding the danger posed by Nazi Germany. A large population of Americans ignored the tales of the Nazi brutality against the Jews because they didn't particularly care about the suffering of Jews. The success of radio personality Father Coughlin's media empire acts as a testament to the anti-Semitic climate in America in the 1930s (Abzug 77). In fact, Coughlin's sermons were comparable to any speech given by a Nazi orator. The Christian Front, an organization to which Coughlin was informally associated, "threatened Jews in the streets and defaced synagogues with swastikas" (Abzug 77). Coughlin, himself, "split the American Catholic Community with his political

demagoguery and anti-Semitism. Although some moderate and liberal Catholic leaders publicly criticized him for his inflammatory rhetoric and especially his anti-Semitic diatribes, most were either silent or openly supported him” (Abzug 77).

Ultimately, many Americans gave their support to anti-Semitism because its repercussions had not yet made themselves abundantly clear. In the '20s and '30s, the possibility of something like the Holocaust was difficult to anticipate<sup>20</sup>— after all, it was the modern age. The world was believed to have moved on from its history of brutality, and Germany, even though hobbled by Versailles and the Great Depression, was a civilized nation. If its leadership shouted racist epitaphs from podiums and blamed its problems on a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, then it seemed only exaggerated political rhetoric. The term “genocide” would not exist until 1944 and would be introduced, in particular, to describe the Nazi’s attempt to destroy all European Jewry.<sup>21</sup> Soon after its introduction, the term would come to imply all the Nazi’s mass murders and not just those inspired by racism.

In depictions by American postwar Universal Newsreel footage, disseminated nationally, the crimes committed by the Nazis were not particularly denoted as racist at all. Pronouncing sentence against Rudolf Hess, Hermann Goering, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and 18 other members of Nazi leadership, the judge read their crimes as: “mistreatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity” (1946 10-08). The film footage that is displayed as the judge reads these crimes are images taken by the signal corps during camp liberation of the Nazis brutality against their Jewish victims—piles of bodies, living skeletons—but

the words that go along with the images make no reference to the race of their victims at all. Of the Universal Newsreels footage of the trial coverage, three separate short films meant to update the American public on the trial proceedings in Nuremberg, none mention that the victims of the camp are Jewish. At their sentencing, the judge continues with the list of crimes to include “crimes against humanity, namely: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts against any civilian population before or during the war.” If even after the war, the Nazis weren’t depicted as homicidally racist, how much less clout would be carried by that depiction in the interwar and war years?

Before America saw images of the camps, Hitler’s brutality was depicted in the American mass media as directed against his political enemies, especially prisoners captured as parts of dissident and underground organizations. Jews had been rounded up and beaten, some murdered, but many Americans assumed that the Jewish prisoners were dissidents and political enemies<sup>22</sup>: why else would Hitler have arrested them? Their beatings and death, if not justified, were at the very least explainable, and explainable with the same narrative that explained Germany’s brutality against its other enemies: they had resisted the will of the Führer. When stories of the mistreatment of Jews emerged, as they often did during the war, they were told alongside stories of mistreatment of Czechs, Poles, prisoners of war, socialists, American G.I.s, and Communists. Moreover, stories of Nazi brutality competed with stories of the brutalities committed by the Japanese against their prisoners of war. There was nothing about the depiction of anti-Semitic violence to suggest that it was somehow exceptional.

Ultimately, the reason that America could not identify the danger of Nazism was because the Nazis were instigating policies in their country that fell in line with popular American sentiments. A belief in racial stratification and the fear of Bolshevism (and, therefore, Jews) were as native in America as they were in Germany. Nazism simply did not appear to be enough of an alternative value system that it could threaten the manner in which America determined value. Ultimately, what America could not do in interwar years was to turn what it knew about the ideology of Nazism into a dystopian vision of social order. It is easy enough after the war to look at the German totalized state as dystopian, but its mannerisms were not depicted, before the discovery of the camps, as resembling the kind of ideology that could lead to a dystopian society<sup>23</sup>. Even its totalitarian elements (which would be the subject of America's definition of Nazi dystopia after the war) were not particularly striking. Through the WPA, FDR had prepared American to accept the benefits of a state-sponsored total mobilization of its citizenry. Nazi Germany appeared to be involved in a similar project, only with more fanfare, more brutality, and less democracy<sup>24</sup>.

Instead, America identified dystopian social orders during the 1920s and '30s as systems of value which threatened to replace traditional values, deemed inherent and necessary for a healthy and moral society. The replacement would result in a complete loss of ethical foundation; the corruption depicted in American dystopian fiction from the period was a satirical reply to encroaching value systems, political and ethical, that deviated from those of the status quo. Production of a dystopian vision during this period was a reaction to new ways of making value like communism or anarchy. Essentially, what Americans feared was a liberal dystopia — wherein the same values espoused by



Richard Rorty, including open-mindedness, subjectivity, and the replacement of truth value with utility — were seen as capable of undermining the traditional values that allowed for and maintained social order.

The problem with depicting Nazi Germany as a dystopia was that there wasn't anything particularly out of the ordinary to recommend it as a new way of making value: Nazis hated foreigners and communists as did many Americans; they wanted to give everyone a job as did Americans; they believed in pulling yourself up by your bootstraps as did Americans; they believed that they didn't deserve their poverty, nor did Americans; and they believed that everyone had to work together towards a solution, as did Americans. What was particularly novel about Nazism was how they enforced their value: they did not stop to take a vote before deciding on a course of action that they felt would be best for the country. Nonetheless, in each case, the values that were enforced were similar, if not the same, to the traditional values that many Americans believed were necessary for social order.

It is clear from the literature of this period that the xenophobia of the First Red Scare and the general climate of isolationism created a description of dystopia for Americans that was based on fears of usurpation by rampant liberalism and its capacity to damage the traditional modes of evaluation and the social order as it stood. The tragedy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), for instance, is that Jay Gatsby does not understand the propriety inherent to social station and thinks that he can simply buy his way into the lifestyle of the wealthy in West Egg, New York.

Because Gatsby does not appreciate the rules of the social order of wealth, he is bested by his rival for Daisy's affection, Tom, who is presented as such an exaggerated cad that the only thing recommending him in the novel as Gatsby's better is his wealth. Jay Gatsby

believes in the power of love, and in the American dream of raising one's self up by one's own efforts. Armed with these two beliefs, he contends for Daisy's love by building an empire of wealth for himself to rival that of Tom's through the only avenue available to him: bootlegging.

The social system of extreme wealth, however, has replaced Gatsby's other, more conservative, definitions of worthiness. Ultimately, Gatsby is allowed little access to the world of Tom Buchanan in which Daisy now resides because the values which should decide between worthy and unworthy have been replaced by a new system not based in essential definitions of virtue but in money. Gatsby may throw his parties, but he'll never really belong in that society and his attempts to win Daisy's love are doomed to failure. In the novel's denouement, the reader learns that Gatsby has sacrificed himself by taking the blame for the death of Tom's mistress Myrtle Wilson and is murdered by Myrtle's husband George. Like Jay Gatsby, George Wilson is utterly beaten by the system of values native to Tom Buchanan and the residents of West Egg. He's hard working, loves his wife, but, because he lives in poverty, his wife is taken from him first by Tom through an affair and then by Tom's wife, Daisy, in a crime motivated by jealousy. In the end, Daisy kills Myrtle because of infidelity, George kills Gatsby because of infidelity, and George kills himself because he feels somehow responsible for the death of his wife just as Daisy assents to a loveless life with Tom out of a sense of self-sacrifice.

Where traditional values remain in *The Great Gatsby*, they become the source of tragedy precisely because newer values make ambivalence and callousness more valuable than compassion. In fact, compassion and fidelity become fatal flaws in *The Great Gatsby* precisely because the American social order satirized by Fitzgerald is corruptively amoral. The characteristics that should be strong—true love, the vows of marriage, and the

entrepreneurial spirit—have no value at all when set next to the quasi-aristocratic system of value as represented by Tom which threatens the American sense of self determination.

In *Babbitt* (1922), likewise, the titular character, George Babbitt, buys his way into the comfort of the newly empowered middle class and gains the appearance of wealth. Without the ability to change his traditional values, however, he is unable to feel fulfilled by what turns out to be a fraudulent existence. As with *Gatsby*, *Babbitt* points to American fears of the potential for systems like communism to upset the status quo; new economic systems complicate supposedly natural orders. In *The Great Gatsby*, the new economic system is an American aristocracy; in *Babbitt*, it is the rise of the middle class and their artless middle class values. The narrative satirizes the manner in which schools become valuable only for raising property values, art becomes valuable only for advertisement, and friends become valuable only as business connections. Everything is valuable only in its capacity to make money. When the puerility of this evaluative system drives George Babbitt's best friend to attempt his wife's murder in order to escape to a more meaningful existence, Babbitt is inspired to rebel against the shallowness of his life by seeking out another way of creating value. Even an escapade in the world of the bohemians, however, gives him no joy. Though he finds a way to live outside his position, his success invites sympathy from the reader rather than congratulations. The lifestyle of art and celebration seems to be yet another fad missing the essential value that would give Babbitt's life meaning. By novel's end, George Babbitt has reverted back to his old self. His ill-fated attempt to find a more meaningful set of values by which to live his life has been forgotten. Even rebellion, for Babbitt, is only a banal version of itself.

Seventeen years after the release of *Babbitt*, the compromise of traditional values for systems of value making, especially morality, is still seen as the cause for dystopian social orders as seen in John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel, based

loosely on the economic devastation of the dustbowl and the reception of migratory workers into California's lush farmlands, depicts California land owners as callous towards the suffering of their fellow human beings. Disregarding long standing values about decency towards fellow human beings who are down on their luck, the land owners make every attempt to force the price of labor down below a living wage and to force the workers themselves into indentured servitude. The novel posits numerous responses to the horrors that the Joads ultimately face as migrant farmers in this system, including Connie's abandonment of the family and his pregnant wife, Rose of Sharon, for other possibilities. Perhaps the most famous response to the system of oppression levied on the Oklahoma born immigrants is that of Tom Joad, the eldest son, who escapes the repression by entering into the life of a revolutionary along with the preacher, Jim Casey. After a fiery soliloquy (in which he ironically keeps telling Ma Joad that he'll "be there"), he and the preacher are absent altogether from the novel, as if to suggest that neither God nor revolutionary ideas can save the Joads from indentured servitude set up by the migrant farm worker system of California agriculture. Again, the instability of the economic system in *The Grapes of Wrath* undermines traditional morality by introducing its dystopian liberal counterpart through economic upheaval. Neither revolution against the new values nor conformity are endorsed by Steinbeck as valid choices for the Joads. Steinbeck shows, instead, that only a return to human decency through the literal milk of human kindness, given by the character Rose of Sharon to her fellow dispossessed, has any value in a California ruled by tyrants and revolutionaries, but even compassion is rendered impotent by the newly introduced economics of migrant labor. Somewhere around Yuba City, Ma and Pa Joad, Uncle John, and Rose of Sharon are abandoned to the caprices of a world that no longer understands human decency or dignity. Like the flood that might, at any moment, carry them away at

novel's end, they've done all they could, but there is no helping being victimized by these new sets of values.

By locating dystopian characteristics in their capacity to supplant conventional morality through radically alternative moral systems, it became impossible to vilify Nazism or fascism as dystopian: both ideologies centered on protecting traditional values and the place of essential truth at all costs (including, most notably at the time, the corruption of democracy). Fascism would have never allowed for the kind of opportunism exercised against one's fellow citizens in *The Grapes of Wrath*, nor would it have allowed for the facile existence of materialism denoted by *Babbitt* or the supremacy of the aristocracy implied by *The Great Gatsby*. Fascism purported to protect the kinds of values that would prevent the dystopian visions depicted in these novels. Most notably, fascism had portrayed itself under Mussolini as anti-Communist. Proponents of nationalism often received foreign aid to help safeguard their nations from coming under the control of the Bolsheviks. In fighting Communism, fascism was positioned against the kind of liberalism that went with economic restructuring and which, ultimately, led to dystopia.

The excesses of Nazism, then, were excused through its definition as an anti-ideology and were, in many respects, seen as in line with American attitudes towards Communism, immigrants, economic recovery, patriotism and the value of being American, and even issues of race. Americans, by and large, didn't embrace the anti-Democratic philosophy of Nazism but neither did they depict Nazi Germany, prewar, as dystopian. Few works in either literature or film explored the repercussions of an American embrace of Nazism.

In fact, negative depictions of Nazi Germany were banned in film even as American films like *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) "toyed with the idea of subverting the Constitution in order to end the Depression and questioned the validity of the American political system, arguing that civil liberties stand in the way of successful governance"

(Birdwell 15). As a result, when World War II broke out and it became necessary for America to vilify Nazi Germany, American propagandists suffered from a dearth of source material from which to construct depictions of its new enemy. They were forced to fall back on old stereotypes borrowed from the First World War concerning the Germans as marauding Huns.

The American propaganda community had very little to fuel its attempt to turn American hatred against the new enemy. The film *Casablanca* presents the limits of American propaganda, at the outbreak of war, to demonize the Nazis, having failed to develop a way of imagining Nazi ideology as dystopian. *Casablanca* typifies this impotency precisely because the film exemplifies American pro-war propaganda. Unlike films that demonized Nazi Germany like *The Great Dictator* or *Sergeant York*, *Casablanca* was filmed after Germany had already become our wartime enemy. Hollywood had been routinely censored from depicting the villainy of Nazi Germany because America had not been at war, but *Casablanca* faced no such censure. In fact, as a piece of wartime propaganda, the movie was designed to make Americans, with two decades worth of isolationist politics behind them, see a war in a faraway land like French Morocco as having a direct relation to them. The film's goal, then, is to present Nazis as so dangerous that stopping them requires our sending men overseas to rescue any nation that they threaten. To perform this function, the film was obliged not to pull any punches for its audience. One would expect from such a film not only full disclosure of the terrible nature of Nazi Germany, the threat that the Nazis posed to the American way of life, but even exaggeration of these themes in its service as pro-war propaganda.

*Casablanca* represents, furthermore, the first time that the movie studio Warner Bros. had free reign with which to treat the Nazi threat. Harry Warner was the son of Polish

Jewish immigrants who had fled Poland to escape a pogrom. In 1932, Harry had seen first hand the blatant anti-Semitism of the Nazis when he went to Germany in a deal to purchase the German film studio, UFA. The deal fell through when the Warner brothers decided that the politics of Germany were too volatile. In 1933, Warner Bros. released *Bosco's Picture Show*, which depicted "'Prezel, Germany,' ruthlessly governed by a buffoonish, lederhosen-clad Adolf Hitler. The cartoon marked the first appearance of Hitler in American film other than newsreel footage" (Birdwell 20). After 1933, Warner Brothers Studio actively crusaded against Nazism and fought against private and public rules concerning unfavorable depictions of foreign countries.<sup>25</sup> It is no coincidence, then, that *Casablanca*, a pro-war anti-Nazi propaganda movie, came out of Warner Bros. studio, but was, rather, part of Harry Warner's ardent desire to use film as an American fight against Nazism.

The film's initial success was owed partly to its capitalization on contemporary issues surrounding the war: the Casablanca Conference to determine the allied plan to attack Europe through the Mediterranean. *Casablanca* was released one day before the close of that conference on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1943. The film's setting in Casablanca put it at center stage to explain to America's citizenry why they were at war with Germany. In a sense, all Americans became Rick and were asked to reconsider our one-time love affair with Europe over the evil menace that was Nazi Germany.

The abundant opportunities and motivations for the demonization of Nazi Germany in *Casablanca* should have made the film a scathing critique of Nazism. Strangely enough, however, the Nazis in the film aren't particularly horrible, and the critique made by the film is fairly tepid. Racism and anti-Semitism aren't mentioned, though by the time the

film was made, partial reports had already emerged of the Nazis pogrom in Poland<sup>26</sup>. The Nazis are the villains in *Casablanca* only because they are bent on world conquest. The Nazi character, Major Strasser, reminds the audience that "Germans must get used to all climates from Russia to the Sahara" (*Casablanca*). He even tries to get Rick to imagine New York under Nazi occupation. If the Nazis are evil because they are imperial, however, the viewer cannot ignore that the film is set in the French territory of Morocco. It isn't immediately clear that foreign control is being actively criticized in the movie except that one doesn't want foreign control by Nazis.

Even the imprisonment of Victor Laszlo, central to the depiction of Nazis as brutes, is undermined of its barbarism; Laszlo is a member of a Czechoslovakian underground organization and is an enemy combatant, not an innocent victim. His incarceration by the Nazis is to be expected in a time of war. Moreover, Victor is as preoccupied by nationalism as the Nazis. He encourages the band to strike up the French national anthem in Rick's bar as a sign of resistance to the Nazi's presence. Even the bar itself, "Rick's Café Américain" is suggestive of the movie's awareness of national identity. If the Germans feel they are better than everyone else because they are German, their position is hardly unique, even in the globally cosmopolitan world of *Casablanca*'s refugees.

It is clear that if *Casablanca* intended to exaggerate the things that Americans should have hated about Nazis, then Americans really weren't clear as to the reasons for their antipathy. The best the film could do was to offer the Germans as instigators of the war—hardly original since this was precisely the way Germans were demonized during World War I<sup>27</sup>. The film's inability to vilify was otherwise evident by its setting. Why not set America's anti-Nazi propaganda in Czechoslovakia or Poland where one might



see the Nazis at their worst? Or England where defeat seemed imminent? By setting the movie in Casablanca under the Vichy regime, Jews were naturally excluded from the film's depiction and issues of anti-Semitism became impossible to address<sup>28</sup>.

Forgetting the Germans, for a moment, the real dilemma in the movie is that Rick, an expatriate in Casablanca has given up his involvement in world politics. He is clearly meant to exemplify American isolationism. He offers his philosophy early on in the movie when he says, "I stick my neck out for no one." To which his competitor Ferrari offers, "When will you realize in this world today, isolationism is no longer a practical policy" (*Casablanca*). It is isolationism that has made Rick morally ambiguous and in doing so, the film attempts to show the philosophy as dystopian. Thus, while the Nazi enemy isn't dangerous in a dystopian sense, American isolationist foreign policy is and so must be abandoned.

Rick must learn that it is morally necessary to take a stand and that to live otherwise is to live in a corrupted state. Ultimately, this means learning to place value again on universal virtues like love and the fight of the underdog against its oppressor. When Rick learns these things, he realizes too that he must resist Nazi imperialism<sup>29</sup>. Together he and his new friend Captain Renault will fight as the "good guys" against the German bad guys. It would be American essentialism versus German essentialism, but the basis for the battle would still be based on an understanding of inherent value, and not a utopian versus a dystopian world view. The battle is not phrased in *Casablanca* as ideological but a function of unjustified patriotism against the unexplained enemy. Essentialism is still preserved as the only acceptable evaluative system because saving France is

important only because it is France, and the German enemy needs to be stopped only because it is the enemy.

The worst that America was willing to put forward about the Nazis was that they have world domination as their prime motivation. In 1943, Frank Capra received a commission by the Defense Department to create the pro-war propaganda film series title *Why We Fight* to be shown to the American troops. Upon completion, the first installment of this series, *Prelude to War* was widely circulated, not just to the military but also to civilians. Its goal was to give the basic underpinning arguments for the war effort, to elaborate what it was, exactly, that made American involvement against the Axis powers necessary. In effect, it is an enumeration of all the means by which America would demonize the enemy and a corresponding list of characteristics which made America admirable.

The narrator of *Prelude to War* begins his explanation with a slowly recited list of countries attacked by the Axis powers in order to give Americans an idea of the war's scope and the necessity for their involvement. The implication is clear: America's efforts were needed precisely because the Axis powers were trying to take over the world. The difference between the Axis and Allied powers is described as hinging on the Allies' desire to take care of their own problems and the Axis desire to fix their troubles by forcing others into slavery—generally by duping their own populations into giving up their freedom. Germany is aided in this endeavor by its “national inborn love of regimentation and harsh discipline” (*Why We Fight: Prelude to War, I*). The villainy of the Axis powers in Capra's film is that they abolish freedoms, and kill anyone who

attempts to resist. In this aspect, Nazi Germany isn't particularly unique from Italy or Japan.

In terms of ideology, Capra depicted the Nazi's predominant characteristic as their hatred of Christianity. The narrator of *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* offers: "The word of God and the word of Führers cannot be reconciled...Then God must go!" The film shows the Nazis disbanding religious groups, destroying churches, murdering priests, and giving speeches which replace Christ with Hitler as the intermediary between God and man. The Nazis treatment of Jews are an afterthought in the film—their persecution is mentioned only once, vaguely, and only after the persecution of Protestants and Catholics.

Propaganda may have mentioned the terrible nature of German occupation, but in retrospect, it failed miserably to show the atrocities to which the Nazis would prove capable. Only two American wartime posters suggest Nazi atrocities in a way particularly recognizable to a postwar audience. The first depicts Frenchmen with their hands raised in surrender. The caption reads, "We French workers warn you... defeat means slavery, starvation, and death<sup>30</sup>" (Shahn *We French Workers*). The poster offsets the image of the French attempting to thrive under occupation as they seemed to be doing in *Casablanca*. While its text speaks of the kinds of things which Americans would later, postwar, come to associate with Nazi atrocities, the paintings visual language is timid: French holding up their hands, rather than French up against a wall facing a firing squad, or French awaiting the torture of which the text speaks.

The other poster released, also a work by Ben Shahn<sup>31</sup>, which depicted real Nazi atrocities concentrated the repercussions of the killing of Nazi Controller of Bohemia and

Moravia, Reinhard Heydrich. In retaliation, Hitler ordered that vengeance be taken out on the town of Lidice, Czechoslovakia. The poster showed a man dressed in a suit shackled to a brick wall with a burlap sack over his face. The caption reads, ‘Radio Berlin—it is officially announced: all men of Lidice—Czechoslovakia—have been shot: The women deported to a concentration camp: The children sent to the appropriate centers—the name of the village was immediately abolished.’ 6/11/42 115p<sup>32</sup>,’ (Shahn, *This is Nazi*). The poster illustrates an actual atrocity committed by the Nazis in Lidice: the men were all murdered, as were most of the women and children, who were taken to Ravensbruck.

The poster, titled *This is Nazi Brutality*, was the only poster manufactured by Americans for the war effort that drew from an actual story of a Nazi atrocity to create its propaganda, despite the fact that there were hundreds of towns just like Lidice with equally horrifying tales to tell of the Nazis as murderous brutes<sup>33</sup>. Altogether, the United States designed only two posters to address real war crimes committed by their foe. Comparatively, they made about the same number of posters which discussed the strength of a racially integrated army, about twice as many discussing the dangers of syphilis, and many times as many for its various campaigns (posters which encouraged women in the workforce, buying war bonds, rationing, donating for the war effort, not taking a sick day, etc.).

America’s campaign to demonize the Germans relied, instead, on theoretical dangers (loose lips sink ships), archetypal tragedies (churches or the Statue of Liberty on fire, drawings of American neighborhoods hit by shelling), and exaggerated caricatures of beetle-headed Nazis. The fantastic aspects of propaganda were embraced, even though

the real acts of the Nazis were far more disturbing than any image of a blood-crazed Adolf Hitler with a combat knife<sup>34</sup>. The atrocities committed in towns like Lidice all over Europe, unmentioned by Capra, films about Nazis, or the numerous posters made to serve the war effort, could not be made to fit into America's vision of their enemy as world conquerors or Americans as particularly patriotic for doing our part (the oft repeated slogan in so much war propaganda intended to offset isolationist views). As a result, actual Nazi crimes were seldom employed. Even in the image of Lidice, the man standing at the center of the picture is alive, the women mentioned in the text will remain alive, and the children will be taken to relative safety. In *Why We Fight*, Capra's propaganda includes dead women and children, but their deaths are the accidents of shelling and high altitude bombs. No one is accused of having targeted them specifically because America would have thought that degree of brutality outside their definition of the enemy.

Though America's wartime propaganda campaign demonized the Nazi as a military enemy and a brute, it did neither in any particularly exceptional or novel way. In Capra's second film in the *Why We Fight* series, *The Nazis Strike*, Hitler is compared to Genghis Khan, recalling how, in WWI, Kaiser Willhelm II was referred to as the Hun. The World War II Nazis were only as evil as any other wartime enemy (they certainly weren't worse than Japan or Italy). If Nazi Germany proved exceptional, it was in their military strength and their unwillingness to honor treaties. Unlike Italy, which had attacked undefended Ethiopia, Hitler attacked well-prepared Europe and had all but succeeded by the time America entered the war.

Because American had never before shown the danger of Nazism as being capable of more pronounced corruption—the corruption of value, the Nazis couldn't have been depicted as morally alien at the outbreak of war—it simply wouldn't have made sense to Americans. The image of the Nazis as worthy and potent military adversaries was much more accessible because it didn't require a re-imagining of Nazism and it, of course, made the Americans who fought against the Nazi military strength that much more valiant. It emphasized the value of American patriotism not the horror of Nazi occupation.

Americans were, then, ill prepared to accept the nature of Nazism made self-evident with the liberation of the camps. The films of camp liberation, disseminated to millions of Americans through newsreels released just before the German surrender, are demonstrative of the resiliency of the America's understanding of its role in the war, and its definition of Nazism as brutally imperialistic rather than anti-Semitic. The films nearly completely overlook Jewish suffering. More often than not, Jews aren't mentioned at all as Jews, and when they are, they are subordinated to a long list of other victims. The narrators of the films either describe the prisoners as political or group them according to nationality.

In the liberation of Ohrdruf, for instance, the narrator relates that the victims include Poles, Czechs, Russians, Belgians, German Jews, and German political prisoners. In the liberation of Leipzig and Penig, no mention whatsoever of Jewish prisoners is made. In the filming of the liberation of Hadamar, the narrator explains that the victims include “Poles, Russians, and Germans, sent here mainly for political and religious considerations.” The films were incredibly well disseminated publicly and defined for

most Americans what had happened in the camps: Hitler's political enemies were tortured and starved.

The Army Signal Corps — who made the films — had watched *Why We Fight* as part of their preparation for war, and they continued the national narrative of the enemy in that same vein when they began to film. They went in looking for the military and political enemies of Hitler, and those were precisely the people they found. The result of the film is a universalization of the suffering caused by the Nazis. The Jewish identity of the victims is undermined, as is the racist ideology that motivated the atrocities.

These films were widely disseminated as newsreels and were shown to large audiences in American movie houses nationwide. According to Jeffrey Shandler, “The Film Daily announced record-breaking audiences...In an unprecedented move, the RKO Pathe newsreel containing this footage was screened for both houses of the U.S. Congress on 30 April and 1 May” (10).

The newsreels did not, however, represent the only way in which Americans learned about the conditions in the camps. *Time* magazine published its expose on the Majdanek camp on September 11, 1944 under the title, “Murder Inc.” The article is a retelling of a guided tour of the camp given to the article's author, Richard Lauterbach. In two separate instances, Lauterbach suggests the identities of the victims. In the first, he writes, “On one day, Nov. 3, 1943, they annihilated 18,000 people—Poles, Jews, political prisoners, and war prisoners” (Abzug 180). In his second description, he writes, “Back in the camp we saw a room full of passports and documents. Papers of Frenchmen, Russians, Greeks, Czechs, Jews, Italians, Belo-Russians, Serbs, Poles” (Abzug 181). In neither description are Jews the primary victim, and in both instances, they are listed as a

longer list of other kinds of victims. In his second description, Jews are the fifth group mentioned out of nine. The effect is to deemphasize the Jews as a group singled out for extermination by the Nazis, and to turn the Nazi atrocities into an example of rampant imperialism instead of homicidal racism.

The confusion of the nature of the crimes is endemic of almost all the various outlets by which Americans learned about the camps. When, for instance, on April 15, 1945, famous broadcast journalist and war correspondent Edward R. Murrow broadcasted to America his experiences at Buchenwald, he mentions all manner of victims — Czechs, the French, the mayor of Prague — but he makes no mention of Jews. Murrow describes the camp's population as a grouping of Hitler's military enemies, emphasizing the tyrannical villainy of the Nazis and not their particular racism or their propensity to torture and murder innocents.

According to Murrow, the Nazis are guilty only of mercilessly punishing their enemies. Near the broadcast's end, Murrow draws a connection between the camp's liberation and the death of Roosevelt:

I was there on Thursday, and many men in many tongues blessed the name of Roosevelt. For long years his name had meant the full measure of their hope. These men who had kept close company with death for many years did not know that Mr. Roosevelt would, within hours, join their comrades who had laid their lives on the scales of freedom. (Abzug 200)

Clearly, the point of the broadcast is that the enemies of Hitler have been saved, and Roosevelt is their savior. The implication, too, is that Roosevelt died fighting for their freedom, implying that FDR had, all along, been pushing forward to find the camps and liberate them.



In Murrow's message there was no hint of acknowledgment that his lionization of a national leader was reminiscent of the motives for Buchenwald's construction: that the officers of the camp had offered up their "Heil Hitlers" at the same place that he, then, offered up his praises of Roosevelt. Just as Murrow does not recognize the implied similarity between American and German values, he clearly also does not realize that the unquestionable sanctity of national virtue has been tested and shown to be dangerous in places like Buchenwald.

The mindset of Murrow and his listeners was that America should take the usual laurels offered the military victor at the end of a war: the enemy had been shown to be horrible, the victor assumes a position of valiancy, heroism, and above all, moral right. That the nature of victory had been changed in battling the essentialism of the Nazis would not complicate American morality, so long as the United States could depict Nazism as a defeated military enemy and not as a nation that had committed atrocities guided by an ideology similar to that held by Americans.

Though the Nuremberg trials later enumerated the crimes of the Nazis and revealed their genocidal nature, the manner in which Americans learned about the trials was also through the same newsreel footage that carried with it the same desire to universalize the Nazi's crimes and to avoid mention of racism. The stories simply recast the Nazi war crime tribunals in terms they had used earlier to describe camp liberation. The atrocities would not take a predominantly anti-Semitic tone until the 1960s. Up until then, the stories of the camp weren't particularly stories about suffering Jews.

What is clear from these examples is that America entered the war under the pretense that the Nazis were imperialistic in their desire to rid the world of rampant liberalism and that it was the excesses of their tactics and the resulting need for world domination that necessitated America's military action in Europe. Racism was rarely cited in popular American culture as a pretense for war, even if it was acknowledged that Nazism was a racist ideology. The wartime propaganda that was built from these assumptions, continued in the same manner. By vilifying the imperialistic drives of the Nazis and mentioning only in passing the issues of race and racism, such that when the camps were discovered and evidence was given of crimes which, according to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, "beggared description," the media produced descriptions as best as possible from the propaganda as it had stood, although though the crimes themselves were far worse than what even the wildest of propaganda had considered possible. The overall effect of which was to leave most Americans on shaky ground.

The problem with the descriptions of the camps as they were given by the mass media was that America was ill-prepared to understand Nazism as a dystopian ideology, and thus was ill-prepared to understand the obvious images of a dystopian society that were displayed through the camera lens of the camp liberators. America had not been called upon to ask whether the values it shared in common with the Nazis might be dangerous, and had instead been allowed, for the most part, to ignore those commonalities in favor of some other characteristic of Nazism that recommended their villainy. Such an interrogation would have endangered the postwar narrative of America as a victorious and virtuous nation, and would have rendered the inherent goodness of America suspect.

How could America be good in defeating the Nazis if it also resembled the Nazis through their racism?

What places like Buchenwald, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen should have suggested was that without provocation, a people convinced of their own superiority: could murder innocent men, women, and children without any obvious feelings of guilt; that they would, in fact, call their crimes patriotism or see their violence as enacted in response to a higher calling; and that these mass murders were more a matter of course rather than an exception. If the victims of Nazism proved casualties of a belief about a master race or the inherent superiority of one nation, however, then America could not tout its own superiority without appearing similar to the enemy it had just defeated. The *Why We Fight* film series began with a quote from Henry L. Stimson, then Secretary of War: “We are determined before the sun sets on this terrible struggle our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom on the one hand...and of overwhelming power on the other” (*Prelude To War*). The viability of Stimson’s language after the war all but depended on how one imagined the Nazi enemy after the revelation of their atrocities. If one understood the Nazi enemy as ideological and dystopian, then Stimson’s language eluded to an American narrative similar to that used by Nazi Germany to vindicate their entrance into war. One had to but understand the “terrible struggle” in terms of Hitler’s struggle (*Kampf* in German). To believe America inherently great, as was the climate following the war, one was all but required to imagine the victims of Hitler as his universal wartime enemies, and to forget issues of race.

The shock of the camps, however, proved a force not so easily ignored. If perhaps the American mass media had attempted — accidentally or otherwise — to eradicate racism as a key motive for Hitler's crimes, it did so conspicuously. Suddenly, here was an example drawn from the real world of a dystopian society, which had not been built on rampant liberalism but rather on dogmatic defense of traditional and national values: a dystopia built from the far right rather than the far left. The result was a necessary change in world views about what constituted a dangerous society. At the very least, the effect of this was the inability to return to a prewar mindset where the main threat to social order was liberalism.

## CHAPTER 3

### AMERICA ÜBER ALLES: THE LURE AND THE DANGER OF POSTWAR

#### AMERICAN PATRIOTISM

The end of the Second World War affirmed, in America, the country's inherent greatness. Its survivors were awarded the title: 'The Greatest Generation' precisely because of their defeat of Nazism as the greatest evil. Those who believed in the natural superiority of the American way, however, could do so only by ignoring that such beliefs were a contributing factor to the idea of national identity which the Nazis had proven untenable and which had led to the infamous death camps revealed to the public through the burgeoning American mass media. Nazis had shown the inhuman limits of a belief in the natural superiority of a people and had called into question the virtues of nationalism. This paradox between rampant nationalism as evil, on the one hand, and battle-proven patriotism as good on the other, made it difficult to reconcile a belief in the superiority of America without ignoring the basic tenets of Nazism. Those who began to describe America as an inherently great country could do so only by ignoring the lessons learned by the war. Criticism of the patriotic attitude began to be heard through redefinitions of utopia particularly within the media of literature and film as artists attempted to reveal and navigate the paradox that came with defeating the essentialist philosophy of the Nazis, while still maintaining the essentialist attitudes that supported the greatness of America.

Not surprisingly, the most able to critique the patriotism of Americans as akin to the essentialism of Nazi philosophy were those outside the country. Authors and filmmakers outside the United States often proved in a better position to learn the lessons of their

encounters with Nazis and Nazi Germany precisely because they lacked America's impetus towards a patriotic self-image that depended heavily on defeating the Nazis and rescuing Europe. England had, for instance, won the war, but they had to be rescued by America for that victory. Some writers, like George Orwell and Jorge Luis Borges, were obviously skeptical that the world had learned the lessons it was supposed to learn in its defeat of Nazism, but the critics of nationalism were not all foreign born. Numerous American writers challenged the old utopian notions through tragedies which showed a belief in traditional values as being baseless and self-destructive.

Perhaps the least able to deal with the change in attitudes necessitated by America's encounters with the camps were those who had already staked a career on the utopian vision that had prevailed before the Second World War. Writers like Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein may have played heavily with form and concepts in the modernist tradition, but in the end, they were driven by prewar values that were being contested through the discoveries of the war.

In Baudrillard's analysis of the effect of simulation within culture, he posits that the expected reaction to the hyperreal is nostalgia for the real, and in particular, according to Baudrillard, a nostalgia for fascism. Nazism represents, in this sense, a hyperreal ethical position. The Nazis are used as a model for, not an example of evil—the confusion concerning the motives for the camps only reinforces this point. What Baudrillard means by the term fascism, however, differs from the pedestrian meaning of the term and, therefore, bears some explanation. Baudrillard suggests that when an evaluative system becomes a simulation, such as when essentialism survives only as a belief structure rather than an acknowledgment of inherent truth, one yearns for a time when the evaluative

systems were stable—not beliefs but facts—and Baudrillard suggests that forcing a vision of stable values based on that nostalgia is fascistic.

Once Nazism ceased to be evil because of inherent rules about good and evil and became a system by which such rules were devised, comparison to Nazism became the basis for a hyperreal ethical system. One of the side effects of this hyperreality, following from Baudrillard's analysis, is that people began to yearn for a system of ethics founded upon inherent rules and to view this yearning as nostalgia for a time before Nazism had complicated ethical analysis.

Perhaps the most succinct of these postwar positions of nostalgia was that of Gertrude Stein, elucidated in her short essay "Reflections on the Atomic Bomb:" "I had not been able to take any interest in it" (823). She goes on to explain that "it's the living that are interesting not the way of killing them." The threat of the bomb would prove instrumental to the development of Cold War culture, but Stein is simply uninterested. Her analysis is, however, either incredibly naïve or stubbornly ambivalent. If Stein isn't concerned about the dead, if she is not fascinated and horrified by the death camps, then she is in the minority. The rest of the postwar world will increasingly use Nazism as a metaphor for evil precisely because the dead do demand attention.

For Stein, what is clearly the source of her duress are two evaluative systems in competition, both of which utilize values that are supposed to be universal. The older of the two value systems imagines Americans in their romantic expatriated state as world travelers like Rick Blain of *Casablanca*, who are able to rub elbows with anyone anywhere and who are universally respected by all foreign cultures. The newer value system, indicative of inventions like the atom bomb, is the rather paranoid image of

America against an ideological enemy that could pop up anywhere in the world and against whom the threat of atomic weaponry is necessary to divide the globe up into spheres of influence. Stein calls the latter system uninteresting precisely because it impedes on the modernist, and by 1945, nostalgic view of America within a global framework—the atom bomb is counterproductive to the expatriate mission as American cultural emissaries and hearkens to the Nazi ideal of achieving national virtue by threatening the world. It curbs the experiences of trans-nationality among the living.

This change in character of America's national narrative is, nonetheless, necessary because the fight against fascism has greatly affected it. Stein's view of American essentialism simply cannot hold in light of Nazism and the atrocities that had become associated with the war. The Parisians one sups with might well be Vichys or the anti-Semites that prompt Sartre to write *Jew and Anti-Semite* (1943). One cannot retreat to Trieste for some years to live amongst the good decent Italians there who just happened to have been of late among Mussolini's fascist power base.

The image of Europe is degraded by its late horrors. It is no longer feasible for Americans to supplant the native politics with the Yankee dollar. Bacchanalian revels lose their charm in the world of the conquered. The American must change from the visiting artist, to the defending soldier, to the political overlord in order to prevent local politics from going bad. The image of Americans from the modern period would no longer hold, except naively. If it is only the living that are interesting, then one must wonder at one is to say of Buchenwald.

Further evidence of the nostalgic position's failure can be seen in Hemingway's postwar novel *Across the River and Into the Trees*. The main character, the Colonel,



visits Venice after the war, a city which he defended as a young man and which he thinks of as his home. He passes by the old haunts of his former friends, some of whom have gone, others remain, only to settle into the hotel of a friend, the “Gran Maestro” where he rendezvous with his 19 year old lover, Renata.

The story is ostensibly about the aging Colonel, his life as a real soldier, and the way in which the world passes over a “tough boy” like the Colonel in favor of Generals who have never fought a day in their life. The story reveals that the Colonel was a General at some point but was demoted because of battlefield decisions and a general sense of prejudice in American military command against actual soldiers.

The Colonel’s friends in post-fascist Italy are all clearly the kind of European one expects to see in expatriate literature, but who are remarkably out of place after 1945. They smile, they’re witty, they have endured various trials with the Colonel and are thus fiercely loyal like Italian Gunga Dins. The Gran Maestro, in the midst of a war shortage in a defeated nation, feeds the Colonel and his young mistress bottle after bottle of wine. The gondoliers enthusiastically row the couple about Venice as the elderly Colonel paws at 19 year old Renata.

Hardly a squeamish writer, Hemingway visits wars often in his novels, especially the First World War in *A Farewell To Arms* and the Spanish Civil War in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but *Across the River and into the Trees* took Hemingway years to complete precisely because of his difficulty writing about the Second World War. That difficulty, whatever the aesthetic achievements or failures of *Across the River and into the Trees*, is writ large in the world of Hemingway’s Venice. As the Colonel attempts to tip a waiter, he begins a conversation that is extraordinarily uncomfortable for a postwar reader:

“You already made the notation on the check. Neither you nor I nor the Gran Maestro are starving.”

“What about the moglie and the Bambini?”

“I don’t have that. Your mediums smacked our house in Treviso.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You needn’t be,” the second waiter said. “You were a foot soldier as I was.”

“Permit me to be sorry.”

“Sure,” the second waiter said. “And what the hell difference does it make? Be happy, my Colonel, and be happy, my Lady.” (Hemingway 150)

The waiter, whose wife and child were killed by American forces, is not angry at the Americans; he recognizes, as a soldier, the horrors of war and forgives. His family dead, he doesn’t bear a grudge at all, but wishes his would-be benefactor happiness. Does Hemingway simply not understand that this isn’t how people react after war? That grudges will be born for the horrors conducted? One has trouble imagining a Pole offering the same sentiment to a commander of the German Wehrmacht. It is as if it is impossible for Hemingway to write a character who holds America accountable for its actions because to do so would be to put American beliefs under scrutiny. America, ever virtuous, is even the good guy to people whose families have been killed by United States military forces. The scene is deplorable in its naiveté.

Hemingway’s novel envisioned America’s place in the world in a way that had simply become no longer valid. The Italians all greet the Colonel as a liberator even though he and they had been wartime enemies. For many, he is a conqueror. Fascism is all but missing from the novel. The Colonel seldom runs into any Italian who doesn’t immediately like him, and in fact, shares enough freedom in Venice that he can, at 51, have a sexual affair with a 19 year old woman without suffering scorn.

Hemingway simply refuses to associate his vision of Europeans with the atrocities committed by fascists. When Renata asks the Colonel if he likes many Germans, he answers:

“Very many. Ernst Udet<sup>35</sup> I liked the best.”  
“But they were in the wrong.”  
“Of course. But who has not been?” (122)

It is a strange response for anyone who has seen the piles of bodies in the news reels which presumably Hemingway had. But like Stein and Murrow, Hemingway’s goal was not to present an essentialist dystopia but to revel in the unquestionable virtue that had always been a laurel of the military victor.

Failure of the nostalgic position is in no way historically or rhetorically insured. There was no inherent reason that America could not reconstruct images of Europe, and Americans there, in terms of its romantic prewar value. Had the enemy simply been defeated and allowed to fade into history books, this might precisely have been the case. It hadn’t been Americans, after all, who had corrupted international politics, but the Nazis. In fact, if America’s self image after World War II, as the defender of the free world, the force of liberty, the guardian of democracy, and the rescuer of Europe all depended upon essentialism (which all of these epitaphs surely do), then it was counterproductive for America to recognize the dystopian possibilities in essentialism lest it risk losing its position.

The pictures of the camps, however, kept Nazi Germany in the minds of Americans and made it imminently available for analogy as an example of cruelty, brutality, and evil. Susan Sontag says of the photographs of the camps, “that [they] have gained the status of ethical reference points,” and suggests that in this capacity they are unique as

photographs that “keep their emotional charge” (*On Photography* 21). For Sontag, whose analysis of photography suggests their transitive and contextualized meanings, only images of the camps are exempt from the principles that otherwise follow from her argument. They are ethical reference points in a world that has abandoned stable reference. Their position as exceptions suggests them as a cause for this abandonment.

As it is natural for a victorious nation in war to pronounce itself virtuous in that victory, so, too, is it natural for the victor to portray the defeated enemy as decadent, corrupted, or otherwise deserving of its defeat. To this end, America used the film and photographs of camp liberation to validate itself ethically. In a sense, the Nazis were natural candidates for analogy to evil simply because they were the defeated enemy, but the Nazis excelled at this position because of the scope of their crimes and the sheer audacity of their motives: the Nuremberg defense will always mean “I was only following orders,” not because no one before had followed orders but because no one before had committed such horrible acts with no other motivation than obedience. The largesse of the crimes makes them exceptional, and through analogy, exemplary.

The crimes nature, too, contributed to the frequency by which analogies to the camps could be used. When, in 1948, it became clear that Russia hoped to starve its portion of Germany out of existence, how could Americans not recall the images of the starving prisoners from only a few years before? The Berlin Airlift as the opening shots of the Cold War naturally (and ironically) built upon the images of Nazi atrocities. Even if the image system had not proven evidence of a dystopia based on a belief in universal values, it appeared with such frequency that it forced the obvious question of what it all did, exactly, mean.

Finally, the surprise of the crimes gives the Nazi atrocities a kind of value as a description of evil. Because the discovery of the camps so shocked their liberators and the American public, they came to hold a value of evil above and beyond the exaggerations of wartime propaganda. How America had depicted Nazi Germany during the war was nothing compared to what the Nazis had actually done in places like Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. Their evil was worse than America could have imagined, thus the Nazis became synonymous with an evil that was beyond reckoning. America envisioned itself as heroic in equal measure to the villainy it had defeated.

George Orwell, in his essay, “Politics and the English Language” (1946) complains about the lack of fixity for the term fascism which he observed had begun to be used as a general political invective. His commentary suggests that even just after the war analogies involving Nazism were already in use in the context of political arguments to create a stable meaning against which other governments could be compared and critiqued, and with such frequency that they demanded his commentary (*The Orwell Reader* 359). Assuming that these analogies were commonplace, one must assume that the question of Nazism is likely to be necessarily asked to some degree in each instance: if one compares something to Nazism, one must have some idea in mind what exactly Nazism means.

Use breeds familiarity and highlights problems in definition and earlier assumptions—the hyperreal model validates itself based on earlier models which must come to mean something else—a belief in fixity is, according to Baudrillard, fascistic and according to Richard Rorty, an impediment to the mindset necessary for a liberal utopia. The statements of anti-Semitism and racial hatred, once believed to be little more than

political posturing, began increasingly to mean something more after the footage of the camps. As one heard comparisons to Nazism again and again, one remembered the values espoused by the Nazis to mobilize their nation for war.

The question of what Nazism had meant for the Postwar culture is intrinsically linked to what Americans had thought about the dangers of Nazism during the war and how that understanding was supplemented and changed by images of camp liberation. I have argued, thus far, that mass American culture reacted to Nazism predominantly as an ideology bent on global conquest and that, ultimately, racism had very little to do with how America imagined the Nazi enemy or the Nazi's crimes. I have suggested, likewise, that this reluctance to recognize racism as the driving force behind Nazi ideology was a product of America's own reluctance to acknowledge the dangers of racism within its own borders. Clearly, then, my description of mass cultural beliefs is related not only to attitudes attributable to a democratic majority but also to the population which held power: namely white Americans.

For African Americans, the assumptions about the dangers of Nazism and what the war meant were obviously different, as is evidenced by the artistic works and political rhetoric fostered in African American culture during this period. According to Gunnar Myrdal in his essay "America Again at the Crossroads" (1944):

In this War the principle of democracy had to be applied more explicitly to race. Fascism and Nazism are based on a racial superiority dogma—not unlike the old hackneyed American caste theory—and they came to power by means of racial persecution and oppression. In fighting fascism and Nazism, America had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and cooperation of racial equality. It had to denounce German racialism as a reversion to barbarism. (Young 21)

What Myrdal identifies in this sentiment is that America, in fighting against the essentialism of Nazi Germany, made manifest by their racism, would have to acknowledge its own essentialism as dangerous and corruptive. The sentiment is mirrored in the snippets of speech from the African American community concerning the war recorded by Sterling A. Brown in “Out of their Mouths” (1942). For example, Brown records:

*A Negro bragging at a gas station:* “I done regist. Expect to be called soon. That Hitler. Think he can whup anybody. I’m gonna capture Hitler. I’m gonna deliver him to President Roosevelt. At the door of the White House.”

*The white bystanders applauded.*

“Then I’m gonna fight for some rights over here.”

*The whites froze up.”* (Brown 34)

Clearly, the suggestion that Americans unanimously ignored racism as the primary danger of Nazism is to miss the mark that it was, for many Americans, this very characteristic which provided a reason to fight against Hitler. In fact, the fight against homicidal racism was seen by experts like Gunnar Myrdal as a reason for hope that the relationships between white and black Americans would improve. The eyes of the world were, after all, watching.

To a degree, the change hoped for by Myrdal and for many members of the African American community actually did result from the confrontation with Nazi Germany. Race and racism ceased to be definitive in America’s description of its enemies. Russians were rarely vilified by their race but by their ideology and even in combat situations where the enemy was Asian, ideology was emphasized over race, by linking communist enemies together into a single enemy of democracy. Anti-Communist sentiments subsumed America’s racist attitudes until the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision to integrate the schools brought racism again to the forefront of America’s rhetoric.

The reemergence of American racism as motif in the mass media only a decade after its involvement in the war, stirred African American's to critique America's reluctance to change. Assumptions about a postwar America that had learned its lesson from its fight with Hitler, ultimately, incited the issue of civil rights for three decades to come. African Americans assumed that America would change; when it refused, its reluctance, even when presented with the dangers of racism through the horrors of the camps, would be a signal that change would not come without protest, struggle, and threat.

To say, then, that Americans slowly came to understand the dangers of essentialism through its war with the Nazis is to ignore that many Americans were already well steeped in the danger of that essentialism through racism, and that a great many other Americans were unwilling to give up their essentialist views precisely because of their own racist sensibilities. For the latter group, it was easy enough to rephrase the danger of the Nazis as rampant imperialism. By removing race from their discussions of Hitler and the Nazis, they could continue on with previous theories of utopia.

In 1953, Leo Strauss, for instance, defends essentialism in virtue (calling it "Natural Right" to imply things that are naturally, or inherently, right) by claiming that all too often the belief in the "natural right" is disparaged because of its implied association with Nazism. From this complaint, he coins the phrase *Reductio Ad Hitlerum* in which one fallaciously posits that anything relatable to Nazism must be bad. Ironically, he attempts to recall older dystopian models by suggesting that the Nazi's view of morality was based in historicism, or the understanding that, historically, moral values had been different and that the Nazis, thus, believed that moral values were arbitrary: context dependent evaluation breeds dystopia because the Nazis believed in context dependent value and



Leo Strauss attacks context dependent value through a *Reductio ad Hitlerum*. Because analogies to Nazism became frequent after the war, risking disillusionment with universal value, the United States would require a new vision of dystopia with which to describe the Nazis, one that took account of their enemies' essentialist motives.

Such models for dystopia certainly existed, but weren't popular in America before, during, or immediately after the war. Outside the U.S., Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges had developed such a model and had used it, prewar, in both fiction and non-fiction to critique Nazism in particular. He did not emphasize their brutality, but the moral ambiguity that allowed for them to justify their actions. Borges saw the Nazis, much as Strauss would 12 years later, as ideologically able to ignore universally understood values in order to fulfill their fascistic notions. Particularly, he accused the Nazis of exploiting fluidity in ethics in order to render right and wrong into meaningless terms.

In Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," (1941) the main character stumbles upon a vast conspiracy to document the minor details of a fictional place (the world of Tlön). When these documents are released to the world, Tlön finds full acceptance and a world eager for emulation. The world becomes Tlön. The narrator writes:

"Almost immediately, reality "caved in" at more than one point. The truth is, it wanted to cave in. Ten years ago, any symmetry, any system with an appearance of order—dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism—could spellbind and hypnotize mankind. How could the world not fall under the sway of Tlön, how could it not yield to the vast and minutely detailed evidence of an ordered planet? It would be futile to reply that reality is also orderly. Perhaps it is, but orderly in accordance with divine laws (read: "inhuman laws") that we can never quite manage to penetrate."  
(*Collected Fictions* 81)

Tlön's most salient feature is the planet's language. It lacks any nouns and relies instead only on grammatical cases which develop context: adjectives and verbs. The artificial language of Tlön suggests Borges's own feelings about the dystopian nature of Nazism. To the Nazi there does not seem to be any specific definition of a thing like ethics or morality, or at least, no divine force to validate these laws. Instead they are replaced by human laws which are simply used as justifications for whatever act the Nazi wants to commit.

In his essay "Definition of a Germanophile" (1940), Borges describes a discussion of Germany with a Nazi sympathizer. He writes:

"I always discover that my interlocutor idolizes Hitler, not in spite of the high-altitude bombs and the rumbling invasions, the machine guns, the accusations and lies, but because of those acts and instruments. He is delighted by evil and atrocity... The discussion becomes impossible because the offenses I ascribe to Hitler are, for him, wonders and virtues" (*Selected Non-Fiction* 205).

The inability to concretize language in the face of ideology is, for Borges, specific to this political context: a discussion of Hitler and especially of the war, but there are hints that the situation has an ethical basis for Borges as well. The Germanophile, for instance, seems to hold to his position because he is a brute, but he cannot openly claim this brutality and must, therefore, cloak his respect for violence in meaningless language. Even in this particular description, Borges was still unable to simply say that the Germanophile's deception is an act of malevolence; it is still just a difference in opinion that is insoluble because the language between the two sides has broken down. One might just as easily admire the brutishness of France, England, and the United States in imposing the Treaty of Versailles.

A study of Borges's depiction of Nazism may seem out of place in a description of America's construction of its image of Nazism. He was, after all, an Argentinean writer operating out of Buenos Aires, writing in Spanish, part of a cultural obviously dissimilar to America, and with political sympathies and obligations wholly different from those of the United States. Pre-war, Argentina was sympathetic to Nazi Germany, which accounts for much of why Borges is capable of documenting with such aplomb the experience of talking to Nazi sympathizers—they were all too common in his nation. Moreover, his view does not conform to the idea that fighting the Nazis will save the free world. Argentineans had reason to see England as their oppressor. The Ottawa Pact of 1932, according to Daniel K. Lewis, made "Argentina appear to be an economic colony of Britain" (85). Argentineans were not inclined to jump to England's defense.

What Borges created through his observations of Nazism is a language through which the dystopian elements of Nazi ideology can be described—a manner which America would gradually take up with increasing frequency. Borges does not serve as a model, per se (Americans did not look to Borges to learn how to talk about the evils of Nazism), but as a lucid and early description of the critique to which Nazism was susceptible and that America would use while employing Nazism as a metaphor for evil. His critique concentrates on two major points: the stability of fixed meaning, and the tension between essentialism and context dependent evaluation.

On the first point, Borges is clear enough. Things do not have value of their own outside of social context or language in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." This critique manifest through the narrator's exploration into forged entries in otherwise real encyclopedias and fake encyclopedias made real, by the language of Tlön that can allow

for no stable existence, and by the political fickleness that allows for the propagation of Tlön. The simple nature of his critique is that, if fascism is to work, ‘right’ will have to have a way of meaning ‘wrong.’ In essence, language, according to Borges in “Tlön,” has no constant value, and control over language allows ideology to effectively change the nature of what it means to mean.

In 1948, this sentiment was echoed by Orwell’s critique of Totalitarianism, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and in particular his invention of Newspeak. In the appendix to his book, Orwell’s description of his language bears striking resemblance to the oddities of Tlön. “Any word in the language (in principle this applied even to very abstract words such as *if* or *when*) could be used either as verb, noun, adjective, or adverb” (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 374). As in the Borges story, ideology forces nouns to lose their power to point to things. As they might as easily point to verbs or adjectives, the central theme to Newspeak is that nouns have no inherent fixed meaning. The language of Newspeak allows supposedly fixed states to become malleable and thus amplifies the power of propaganda since supposedly universal values are made susceptible to change through ideology. The language is mirrored by the villainous O’Brien who tells Smith during his interrogation:

You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident. When you delude yourself into thinking that you see something, you assume that everyone else sees the same thing as you. But I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. (*Nineteen Eighty Four* 261)

The key to dystopian thinking in both “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to be based in rampant liberalism, but now it is not simply liberality with evaluative systems that is under critique but the liberality of unfixed meaning.

For Orwell, postwar language had been reduced to a tool of deceptive rhetoric and has lost its capacity for elaboration. It holds no descriptive power because it can not permit a stability of meaning. Orwell, for instance, in 1946, writes:

The words *democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic, justice* have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning. (*The Orwell Reader* 359)

The political language has no basis for meaning; it points to nothing in particular out in the world. A democracy in this sense is not a noun (a type of political structure) but an adjective (a form of praise). Fascism is not a political attitude but a pejorative. No one wants a democracy to refer to a specific definition as this would preclude their own government from defining itself as a democracy<sup>36</sup>.

The very dichotomy between fascism and democracy suggests just how completely ideology has affected definition, because they are not mutually exclusive—Hitler was initially voted into power. Capra, during the war, could not make this distinction (the Nazis are against democratic principles in *Why We Fight*, not democracy itself); after the war and ideological disillusionment with fixed meaning, as Orwell points out, one can say anything at all about the nature of fascism without worry of misrepresentation since there is no fixed definition to which one might compare for inconsistencies. Political language is dominated by words that point back to ideology but which do not represent anything in and of themselves out in the world.

Obviously, the effacement of language for Borges, and for Orwell, Strauss, et. al. was a function of a context dependent morality in which ethical evaluations were made

according to the setting in which the act was committed and in which the evaluation of the act occurred. In such a system, language would have to lose its rigidity, and essentialism would have to be avoided as a system by which exclusionary dictums could be pronounced as if validated from on high. Moreover, the propensity of these writers, carried over from before the war, was to see such systems as dystopian, though Orwell and Borges seem to suggest that they are also unavoidable. No part of the world in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, for instance, is free of a totalitarian government. Tlön is accepted unanimously by the masses of the world. Strauss's natural right is *naturally* right.

Following the dissemination of images of the camp, Borges's vision of Nazi Germany changed drastically to reflect a changed understanding of dystopian values. In "Tlön," the loss of nouns acted as the precursor to ideological malformation and the end of the world as it stands. Ideology takes what people hold to be true and shows it to be malleable: universal values are revealed to be functions of belief and are rendered arbitrary and subject to change. "Tlön" bemoans the world's loss of the ability to believe in the universality of truth and the inherency of value. However, in his 1948 story, "Deutsches Requiem," Borges rescinds this position through a fictional account of the death camps. His assertion is that the loss of essentialism is not something to be mourned as it was precisely a belief in inherent values that originally helped to motivate the Nazi atrocities.

Borges explores these implications through the monologue of the Tarnowitz Concentration Camp's assistant director Otto Dietrich zur Linde. Zur Linde sees his role at the camp, and especially his role in destroying the Jewish artist David Jerusalem, as an attempt to make himself spiritually fit to perform Hitler's will. According to zur Linde,

“Nazism is intrinsically a moral act, a stripping away of the old man, which is corrupt and depraved, in order to put on the new” (231). Zur Linde’s important distinction presents the supplication to Nazism as an ethic, an ethic which he, hours before his execution, hopes to refute.

For zur Linde, the moral act is one of sacrifice. He sacrifices his compassion to achieve an essential ‘good’ only to realize, at his end, that he and his philosophy have turned monstrously evil. But zur Linde’s monstrosity is, according to him, redeemed as well. “There are many things that must be destroyed in order to build the new order; now we know that Germany was one of them” (*Collected Fictions* 234). His monstrosity, and his execution for being a monster, ushers in a new moral order that will pronounce him a villain worthy of destruction. It is this moral facet to zur Linde’s sacrifice, to Nazism, and to the order that replaces Nazism that is missing from the usurpation of the world by Tlön.

Tlön is attractive not as a moral alternative to Nazism but rather because it establishes “an ordered planet” according to human laws (*Collected Fictions* 81). Moreover, it does not attempt to supplement divine laws (which are to be read, according to the narrator, as “inhuman laws”) but rather replaces them completely (81). Ethically, the incursion of Tlön is an anti-redemptive apocalypse; in its abolition of evaluative criteria, it acts as a reverse judgment day by abolishing universal values for good and evil.

Zur Linde in “Deutsches Requiem” suggests an ethical move towards context dependent evaluation by ironically providing a universal definition of evil to react against: himself. The new system will denounce as villainy his belief in essentialism, and in doing so, validate itself. Context dependence, as the ethical philosophy of the postwar

world, is set in this story as preventive of the rise of fascism—all it needs, ironically, is some inherent evil to give it stability—zur Linde offers himself. After exposure of the Nazi atrocities, Borges posited the evil of Nazism as inaugurating context dependent ethical evaluation by creating a single value operating beyond context to anchor the system and to assign an ethical definition against which all context dependent definitions might be measured<sup>37</sup>. His story suggested that in order for context dependent ethics to work it would need a universally accepted definition of evil for an anchor: Nazism provided that definition.

Zur Linde's position as a figure of essentialist philosophy is clear from the beginning of the story when he offers, "During the trial (which fortunately was short) I did not speak; to explain myself at that point would have put obstacles in the way of the verdict and made me appear cowardly" (*Collected Fictions* 229). His silence prevents the contextualization of his act—it prevents explanation, justification, and exoneration and allows him to maintain his position outside of context dependency as inherently evil. Later, zur Linde expands his own view in parallel to that of George Berkeley's ontological position of subjective idealism. Zur Linde writes,

Theologians claim that if the Lord's attention were to stray for even one second from my right hand, which is now writing, that hand would be plunged into nothingness, as though it had been annihilated by a lightless fire. No one can exist, say I, no one can sip a glass of water or cut off a piece of bread, without justification. (*Collected Fictions* 230)

For the theologians, zur Linde explains, this demiurge is the attention of God, but clearly, the validating force he himself recognizes lacks embodiment: justification gives existence.



In this private moment, after he is off the stand and no longer playing the villain, he has already succumbed to the new order for which he will martyr himself. He is putting himself into context, and by doing so, putting his victims into context as well. Those whom he made sip water and live off the crusts of bread are now justified: their extermination and his monstrosity serve as the impetus for an ethical system that no longer relies on the attention of God for ontological existence. Now the human order is something to be coveted because inhuman orders and universal values, even those designated by the divine, lead to monstrosity.

The irony of zur Linde's position is all important as it is precisely irony, in the same manner later described by Richard Rorty that will allow for movement away from a position of nostalgia towards essentialism. Irony allows for an understanding of essentialist values as having dystopian possibilities, and just as importantly, it endorses liberalism and open-mindedness as utopian.

To wit, satirical attacks began as the first real critique of the nostalgic position implied by the reliance on hyperreal ethics, especially those satires which showed America's essentialist narrative as leading to a Nazi like state. The surge of postwar patriotism stirred by America's fight against communism made such satires rare in America during the years immediately following the Second World War even as more frequent analogies were required to demonize America's newest enemy to Nazi Germany. These few instances, however, began to create a new way to discuss the context dependent ethical system that was beginning postwar to evolve and emerge in mass culture through film and literature.

In the British film *The Third Man* (1949), for instance, Orson Welles stars in a scathing critique of the belief in inherent virtue afforded to Americans by virtue of their having defeated the Nazis, forcing the viewer to come to terms with the complexities of morality that follow from causing and preventing atrocity. The film forces the questioning of distinctions such as good and evil especially in the face of crimes which resemble those of the Nazis and in values touted as American.

The film centers on its main character, Holly Martins, who is invited to Vienna to help out his friend Harry Lime, only to find upon his arrival that Lime is already dead—killed the day before in an auto accident. Unable to believe that the accident was only an accident (and somewhat offended that the English police responsible for the middle “zone” of divided Vienna would suggest that Lime was something of a criminal), Martins vows to get to the bottom of things. Martin’s brash American ways (reminiscent of the Westerns which he writes for a living) end up nearly destroying everyone around him. The porter who helps Martins is killed, Lime’s girlfriend Anna is discovered to be a Czechoslovakian posing as an Austrian in order to escape deportation to the Russian sector, and Holly Martins, himself, is followed and threatened by Lime’s “associates.”

Martins’s investigation is otherwise bungled because of his American overconfidence. Ignorant of the city’s political and economic operation, the only thing he manages to discover about Lime’s death through his interrogations is that there was a mysterious third man who helped carry Lime’s body across the street after being hit by a car. His attempt to clear his friend’s good name among the city’s authorities is catastrophic and proves pointless once after he reveals that, even as children, Lime was a con artist: “he was good at fixing things” (*The Third Man*). Both Anna and Martins

refuse to believe that Harry is a criminal even though Anna has a fake passport made by Lime and Martins has been a party to numerous of Lime's childhood and adolescent scams. As in Hemingway's postwar novel and the film *Casablanca*, being American is made to seem more a condition of virtue rather than nationality.

When all seems at its most hopeless, Martins stumbles accidentally upon Harry Lime (played by Orson Welles) who is perfectly alive. Lime, himself, was the mysterious 'third man' present at the accident to which the title of the film eludes. After a brief separation, Lime meets Martins again in a giant Ferris wheel where Harry Lime seems only too proud to admit that he could care less about the victims of his latest scam. He has stolen penicillin from military hospitals, watered it down, and sold it on the black market. His victims fill a hospital: children who, originally suffering from meningitis, now suffer equally from Lime's black market drugs, Martins is positioned by the zone police to take down Lime, but only because they are willing to help Anna. Otherwise, sick children or no, Martins will stick by his friend. He is an American too, after all, and therefore, fiercely loyal. When Anna refuses to be helped, Martins aids the police only because he is taken on a tour of the hospital so that he can physically see the suffering of the children. Eventually, the zone police and Martins chase Lime through the Vienna sewers, hunting him down, and shooting him.

The attack on the inherent virtue of Americans comes under constant attack in *The Third Man*. Martins's career as a writer of Westerns makes him a caricature of the American hero who is brash and bold, will stop at nothing until injustice is righted, who stands by his friends, and does whatever it takes to save the damsel in distress. In the film, Martins shows up and tries to take charge of a situation he knows nothing about. In

his attempt to defend his friend against the “unfair” accusations of Major Calloway, he gets the girl into trouble and ends up causing the murder of the only person in Vienna unlucky enough to offer him help (the porter). Of course, ill informed about his surroundings and unwilling to take his ignorance into consideration, he turns out to be wrong about all things pertaining to his friend Lime; Lime actually *is* responsible for the deaths of a hospital full of children. And the damsel in distress, Anna? She refuses to be saved at the sacrifice of her child-murdering boyfriend.

Most of the action in the plot is driven by Martins’s reliance on the unimpeachable virtue of his (and Lime’s) condition as Americans. He believes, against all evidence to the contrary, that he knows what’s going on in this foreign city (the zone division makes the city foreign even to its natives). Consequently, he is impervious to all advice. At one point, Martins pushes curiously into the midst of an angry mob that believes he’s murdered an old man. As he presses in to see the corpse, those around him whisper accusations in a foreign tongue against him; this scene serves as a model for Martins’s quest. He doesn’t know he’s in trouble and doing the exact wrong thing; he refuses to see that there is a different code of conduct among the inhabitants of the zoned off Vienna—a language of behavior that he does not speak.

While the presence of the Nazi atrocities is not immediately apparent in *The Third Man*, the after effects of the war are imminently available. The overall effect can be quite disturbing. Where ever Martins goes (or is chased) the landscape is crater pocked, and littered with destroyed buildings and piles of rubble. It is unclear whether the viewer should applaud the director’s ability to have brought war-torn Europe to the screen as it was, or whether it’s disturbing to think of a foreign camera crew panning through the

destruction of Vienna so soon after the war. Ruin and city are interchangeable terms in the language of the film though their meanings are, generally, mutually exclusive. The normal linguistic relationship between a city and a ruin is that of before and after, full and empty; in *The Third Man*, the ruin is just another state of the city. Martins is chased down city steps in the same manner as a character might be chased down a set of steps in a film set in another city—they just happen to have a crater in the middle of them in *The Third Man*. No one notices the ruins. No one seems to react to them or even mention them. Somehow, without a single block of the city unscathed, the allies are able to carve the urban landscape up into closed off zones. Even the film's creators seem at odds to describe their position as a-moral agents transforming the destruction of property and lives into a location for a movie shoot: the ever present zither shows the viewer the lack of seriousness with which Martins and Lime understand the tragedy of Vienna (the ruins, the piles of rubble, the dead, the incarcerated, the unmentioned victims), but the zither score also suggests that the playfulness is unfounded, that the situation is neurotic, uncomfortable, and foreign. Among all the characters, only Harry Lime understands the city as a new kind of territory. He uses the now opened sewer as a passage between zones and clammers over the heaps of rubble instead of keeping to the thoroughfares. Near the film's conclusion, the zone police guard a building as Martins lures Lime into a trap, but Lime doesn't approach from the watched street. He climbs over a neighboring ruin which no one thought to watch. Opportunity, tragedy, ruin, city—these have all become just words to Harry Lime, none of which are due more or less reverence.

There's something ghoulish about the scenes that carries over from the film's real world creation and onto the film's fictional hero. Like those who film *The Third Man* in

Vienna, Martins doesn't seem to acknowledge that he's in a warzone only a short time after the end of the war, that the people he is talking to were only recently wartime enemies, or that he has power over these people by virtue of his nationality. When Major Calloway asks Anna for her identification, Martins advises her "don't you give it to him," as if Anna has a choice—as if resisting in this fashion would not end up with her in jail or deported (*The Third Man*). Later, in private, Anna has to explain to Martins why having her identification papers taken away will have catastrophic results. Though he is surrounded by ruins in a territory that a few short years before was part of Nazi Germany, he simply assumes that everything works according to his American view of things.

Part of this view is the notion of Americans as good guy saviors and defeaters of the great Nazi evil—the natural extension of which is a unilateral exoneration of Americans; they can do no wrong. Holly Martins insists that his friend Harry Lime is innocent though he has no idea what Lime has been doing since the war. He knows, of course, that Lime was a small time crook before the war, but protests any present day accusations about Lime. Why Martins thinks Lime went to war torn Vienna in the first place is never quite clear, but he clearly doesn't suspect Lime of taking advantage of the traumatized and destitute Austrians. When Calloway shows him a slide show of Lime's many crimes, the results are indisputable. Even then, Martins isn't willing to betray his friend. After Lime reveals himself, admits his crime, and threatens to push Martins out of a giant Ferris wheel, Martins still has the fierce loyalty that pervades the American romantic notion of its heroism. He has to be physically taken to see Lime's victims before he'll intervene. This reticence to intervene is reminiscent of America's prewar policy of isolationism, but now it is not attack that gets the American to do the right

thing, but a direct look at the children victimized by the monster. The loyalty of Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*, manifested now by Martins, seems idiotic and stubborn.

The orphans suffering from meningitis, and whatever poisoning they've suffered through the tainted antibiotics of Lime, represent mass atrocity and perhaps represent the film's attempt to revisit issues of genocide, but in this instance, it is not fascist tyranny that's causes the suffering. Rampant capitalism is to blame in the form of the black market perpetrated by the always smiling entrepreneur Harry Lime. The "American Dream" seems just as capable as Nazism of crushing people like ants and treating its victims to inhuman torture without mercy.

The American notion of heroism is exposed in *The Third Man* as xenophobic, racist, arrogant, ignorant, and homicidal. Furthermore, the movie is suffused with Nazi-like activities being committed by non-Nazis. Major Calloway wants to look at Anna's papers and once he learns her heritage, he wants to transport her East. Vienna itself is a closed city, like a ghetto. No one gets in or out. The zone police ransack houses without warning or explanation and are indistinguishable from images of the Gestapo in other movies. The Nazis, the Holocaust, the American messianic image are all available in the film language of *The Third Man*, but they are jumbled and do not correspond to the things to which they ought to refer.

There is no point in *The Third Man* where the nominal state of language breaks down as it does in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"—nouns remain nouns, adjectives remain adjectives. Instead the certainty of the particular language breaks down between the French, Russian, American, and English Zones with the Austrian nationals speaking their own tongue. Vienna becomes a heterogloss with between three and four fifths of its

vocabulary unavailable to a speaker at any given time unless that speaker is a multi-lingual, and therefore, able to more capably traverse the new language system. Otherwise, like Martins, there is no navigating one's way through the zones without a translator.

The system of ethics within *The Third Man* is only jumbled further. The Austrians are criminals because they are associated with the crimes committed by the Nazis and also because they must rely on the black market in order to survive. The real crime in the film seems to be the locking down of the Austrians by the regime that is the zone authority, but that regime (located in the shared central zone) is actually multiple regimes. What's more, the power players in the black market are not the Austrians at all, but citizens of the countries that occupy and control Vienna. These foreign nationals have shown up in Vienna like carpetbaggers of old to use their considerable political clout as members of the "good guy" countries so as take advantage of the defenseless Viennese (the criminals incarcerated in their city-prison). If the Viennese require penicillin, they have no access from legitimate authority. Their only hope is that a criminal from France, America, England, or Russia will come to their rescue.

Is there still nominal value in *The Third Man*? Yes, because Calloway can still bring Martins to Lime's victims and know that they will have the desired meaning for Martins. It is this victimization that most closely resembles the crime of Nazi Germany and it is the value of this victimization which is immune to being philosophically demoted from nominal meaning to one of context dependence. As with "Deutsches Requiem" language may ultimately fail to have nominal value so long as some epitome



anchors its ethics. In *The Third Man* that epitome is created through the evil of an act that brutalizes children for money.

These ideas of essentialism as utopian and context dependency as dystopian were already coming under criticism, however, even before the 1950s. In Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), for instance, the audience witnesses the downfall of Willy Loman, who is among other things, a representation of the 'American Dream' at work. He is the ideal salesman, a hard worker, and an obvious participant in consumer culture. The play shows, however, that not only is that dream dead, but it had been a lie all along. Willy's son, Biff gains no inherent virtue from the decency of his father and family name, just as Americans can no longer rely on the nationalist virtue of being good simply in the name of their country.

By the play's end, Willy Loman has been driven insane by his romanticized idea of his own self worth as a salesman and the incongruence between that vision and his own decrepit morality, while Biff has come to realize that all of the values upon which his family relies are founded upon lies. He represents the American consciousness becoming aware that its belief in fixed value have the potential to cause great horror.

The revelation of the demise of the American dream is a product, in Miller's play, of language which has come to fail in its signification. The family learns about Willy's dilemma because he is given to episodes during which he holds conversations with people who aren't there. These conversations are both flashbacks and delusions so that while the audience is presented to the characters' past, it is all a function of madness. In the present of the play, the other members of the Loman family also carry through the obscuring of language as a manner of course, especially through assumptions about their

past and present jobs. When Biff goes to see his old boss, whom he is sure will remember him for his success as a salesman, he realizes that he had never actually held a position in sales and that he had, in fact, only been a shipping clerk. His brother Happy, who considers himself an assistant buyer, is only the assistant to the assistant buyer (321). When reminded by Biff of this position, he responds “Well, I’m practically—” (321). Even in the face of the truth, Happy will not give up his lie. The deceptions in *Death of a Salesman* confuse signification and result in a break down of language in the manner suggested by Orwell and Borges, and just as with Orwell and Borges, this confusion of language seems to be a sign of dystopian principals: language without meaning leads to tragedy, though in this case, the ideology that corrupts the language is particularly American.

Miller, however, presents no easy conclusion about the implications of this befuddlement. It isn’t, for instance, clear that more honest language would have prevented the death of the American dream. Though the audience sees Willy Loman as a man driven and betrayed by his illusions, he is a character who invites sympathy not scorn. While Biff comes to realize through the action of the play that he is essentially “one dollar an hour” and the audience comes to admire his bravery in discovering that knowledge, he is still, in the end, Biff—a petty thief who has a history of getting too rough with the ladies (322). Though the play is ostensibly about his finding his limits, the audience knows that he will not surpass them. Biff’s discovery of the truth is not a success story. In *Death of a Salesman*, truth is not salvation—it does not become Strauss’s utopian natural right—it is as likely to lead to dystopia as are illusions except that its participants are more cognizant of their tragedy.

Miller presents a vision of a world that is not in transition, but that has gone extinct leaving no hope for the next generation, but of course no one in the play is a returning soldier: the thriving force that will come to drive the economy over the next decade is otherwise missing as a witness or cause for the Lomans' downfall. Because of this absence, Miller is capable of discussing the changing values in America without having to acknowledge the amplification of patriotic value inherent to victory. The play insinuates that the Lomans of the world must realize that living through the assumptions concerning the American dream is not enough to keep their romanticism afloat, but for WWII vets, it was precisely this romanticism that opened up a new world for them and was key to the affluent society of the 1950s. The salesman may die in 1949, but patriotic essentialism will not, necessarily, die with him.

The soldier, though absent from Miller's play, is not immune to the degradations of the American dream through stubborn belief in essentialism. Flannery O'Connor explores the morality of the postwar American character through the perspective of the returning soldier in her 1952 satirical novel, *Wise Blood* by referencing Nazism to validate its ethical stance. The ethics of the novel, and the Nazi ethics upon which they are based, deny the ethical state of victim-hood in an appeal to evolution which forces a reevaluation of Christian salvation dogma. Reacting against the atrocities caused by Nazi essentialism, the novel explores the need to abandon all essentialism and then demonstrates the resultant dangers. It performs this examination through the theological arguments of its principal character Hazel Motes.

The novel's protagonist, a one time war hero and aspiring preacher, returns to the American South having left the Army because of a wound to his heart. Hazel's tour of

duty in Europe, presumably during and right after the Second World War, is utterly a mystery to the reader save for a few scenes in which Hazel recalls resisting the temptations put to him by his fellow soldiers, generally involving prostitution. What happened in Europe to cause Hazel's crisis of faith, the reader does not know.

Hazel returns home without any belief in Christ as a savior: Christ has lost his essential meaning. Hazel's postwar goal is to found the "Church Without Christ," which he preaches from the roof of his car to crowds entering and leaving movie theaters. The tenets of Motes's church are otherwise vague, but its central philosophy is offered rather plainly: human beings are not cursed with original sin, and therefore, they do not require someone to redeem them.

The Church Without Christ is fairly unsuccessful in the novel, but not completely—Motes manages to attract one follower: Enoch Emery. Emery, a young man who works as a guard at the local zoo, has an antagonistic rivalry with animals. He thinks that they are lazy as they do little work while he, on the other hand, is forced to guard them. Emery's fascinations also include a mummy in a museum near the park where he works, which seems to stem from its age and its physical degradation over time. The mummy is proof of a non-Christian antiquity, and its condition suggests a kind of removal from physical time. Unlike human beings, the mummy continues, but it is a human being, and therefore, it ascribes divine power to the mundane. Emery's rivalry with the animal kingdom stems from a competition between biological entities that are, more or less, on equal spiritual footing with him, if Darwin and the mummy are to be believed.

The antagonism culminates in his attendance at a matinee for a children's movie where Emery, having been converted to the Church Without Christ and context dependent ethics rather than those based in inherent value, stands in line to meet an ape-actor named Gongga. His goal is, at first, to insult the animal, but when he reaches the front of the line, he is tongue tied. He finally manages to stammer out, "My name is Enoch Emery... I attended the Rogemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen year old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me com..." at which point his attempt to put himself in context is interrupted by the cracking of his own voice (O'Connor 182). Faced with a celebrity, even an animal celebrity, Enoch cannot respond. The indisputable presence of the celebrity is here satirized. Now it is not the essentialist savior Christ who one sees as eminently awe-inspiring, but film celebrity at its most ridiculous extreme, a man in an ape suit attempting to frighten children. The ape-man Gongga, a grotesquerie of essentialism, having caused a crisis in Emery's context dependence faith, tells him "You go to Hell," and sends him on his way (O'Connor 182).

Emery's spiritual quest ends in his final salvation after he has stolen the mummy, taken it to Hazel Motes, accosted the actor playing Gongga, and stolen the ape suit which he puts on as if to continue in life as nothing more than a gorilla—if the gorilla celebrity is the pinnacle of essentialism, a parody of Christ as savior—then Emery, in his new religion, becomes his own savior by donning the costume and putting himself into that context.

But this is satire and O'Connor is attacking the dogmatism of context dependency as much as anything. Her ape lives between two worlds, the celebrity of Christ and the

Darwinian denial of Eden. Emery's submersion into the simian persona, as well as his general attitude towards animals, suggests a strong tie in the novel towards theories of evolution as a replacement for godly orders. According to the narration, "No gorilla in existence, whether in the jungles of Africa or California, or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world, was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded it" (O'Connor 197). In a sense, Enoch Emery and the animals he guards are all equal, but he is subservient because he has to work for food and for relationships. His animal counterparts do not. His donning of the costume alleviates Emery of his human drawbacks.

When Enoch Emery is faced with Gonga, he sees an animal that has entered a world that is closed to him even though he is supposedly privileged as a human and it an ape. Inevitably, Enoch Emery will never matter as much as Gonga. By putting on the monkey suit, Emery is choosing to trade species—assuming that all are equal, it's just a matter for him to find the one that is treated the best. The ape does not have to work, is not despised by women, and doesn't have to worry about its superior genetic state being trampled upon by the beginnings of civil rights. Emery, who is white, feels his world slipping away to a new economic class of African Americans created by the war. People who he once considered brutes, like the animals, are doing better than him.

In many ways, Emery's conversion to the Church Without Christ is as much about changing racial politics in America and an attempt to secure status as a superior species. It is Nazism depicted with animals as the inferior species. Emery acts as O'Connor's slap at those theories of racial superiority derived through notions of fit and unfit species as employed by the Nazis in their institution of the Final Solution. The white characters of

the novel think themselves superior, envy the state of animals, and are willing to go so far as to exclude God so as render their souls unnecessary.

In the shadow of the novel reside notions of superior and inferior species introduced by Darwin, defended in America at the Scopes Trial of 1926, and used by the Nazis to validate their crimes. Whatever has happened to Motes, he has seen the mass power of Darwinism and has seen people whom Christ, in his more traditional incarnation, should not redeem, but will regardless. His entire spiritual system must go, because he cannot believe in a Christ that would redeem such people. Instead, he returns from the war believing in the inherent innocence of human beings that, being above context, can survive the transgressions of experience. Having faced a nation that has allowed unspeakable evils to be performed in its name, Motes finds damnation and salvation to be otherwise meaningless terms. The Nazis have made him spiritually incredulous.

Clearly, the novel presents Motes as protesting too much in his abandonment of Christian tradition. He goes to a prostitute in order to prove that going to prostitutes doesn't bother him. He attempts to seduce Sabbath Hawkes who is in turn attempting to seduce him. He even murders a man who has attempted to steal his identity, all with the point of proving that he is above traditional notions of good and evil. It is also clear that O'Connor means to critique Hazel's moral position. Through the satire, she means to denounce the ethics created by a Church without Christ. Because Motes has become amoral, he cannot castigate and has become, like Enoch, nothing more than an animal. He sees all those around him living in a state of inherent ignorance and innocence, but in reality, they are neither. Motes lives among the wicked, but he cannot recognize the evil because he cannot see anyone in terms of damnation or salvation.

What the works that emerge after the war suggest is that the postwar world could no longer sustain a dystopian image in which ideologies of context dependence led necessarily to amorality, nor could they sustain the utopian image in which the goodness of Americans naturally redeemed the world. Instead, the dystopia of Nazism had resulted from the dogmatism that went hand-in-hand with the belief in inherent values, and as Richard Rorty has posited, utopia began to be viewed more and more a product of liberality.

The frequency of Nazi invocation produced increasingly greater instances in which utopian implications of essentialism proved subject to argument, and, in many cases, became too problematic to sustain. This loss of faith in inherent or universally accepted values marked the need for a different kind of evaluative system and began the rise of context dependent ethical frameworks. The utopian implication of contextualized ethics began to take hold in rhetorical environments where Nazism was most frequently evoked. Postwar, the most common occasion for analogies to Nazism occurred in national politics, just as Orwell had predicted. Fascism and Nazism gained the makings of a ubiquitous pejorative, eminently useful in American propaganda which would, postwar, launch into a new fight against a new enemy, and would need to bring its old enemy along as a reminder of America's inherent greatness.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE THIRD REICH AND THE RED MENACE:

#### THE USE OF NAZIS IN AMERICAN ANTI-COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA

Fascism and Nazism gained the makings of a ubiquitous pejorative, eminently useful in American propaganda which would, postwar, launch into a new fight against a new enemy, and would need to bring its old enemy along as a reminder of America's inherent greatness.

Postwar, America would almost immediately begin the era of diplomatic and military maneuvers against Communist Russia known as the Cold War. During this era, Americans would learn to live with the possibility that, at any moment, the Russians might start a nuclear war that would, more than likely, end civilization, and perhaps all life on Earth. Like other conflicts, the Cold War utilized propaganda to arouse popular support for America's efforts in the conflict and to unify the nation in a common purpose of opposition for communism and as with World War II, this propaganda came in two very distinct forms.

The first form, discussed at length in this chapter, concerns the official narrative of anti-communist efforts in America as delivered from sources sponsored by the state and defense departments. Efforts made by official propaganda from the end of the Second World War until the end of the Cold War were almost always phrased in the evils common to Russia and Nazi Germany, and their success often hinged on the ability to conflate the enemy in this manner. The overwhelming presence of Nazism in anti-communist Cold War propaganda suggests that the fight against the Nazis was necessary

for America to maintain its understanding of itself as a virtuous nation. The use of Nazism as part of descriptions of Communist Russia suggests, also, that reference to Nazi Germany had become obligatory in describing the national enemy, whether that enemy happened to be Korean, Russian, or Vietnamese. In fact, the race of the enemy, and therefore the question of race and racism, was sublimated once that enemy simply became the next manifestation of the Nazi menace through the drive in propaganda to Nazify Cold War conflicts.

The obligatory nature of this imagery was in measure to its effectiveness. Depictions of Nazis were more effective at describing the danger of communism than were actual communist enemies, despite the fact that the Nazis were defeated and passé and communists were routinely accused of indoctrinating American supporters and aiming enough weapons at the United States to destroy the world many times over. The Nazis provided a real world example of evil which, attached to Communism, provided a visual and historical basis for why the communists were dangerous and justified the cost of American anti-communist efforts.

The effectiveness of depictions of Nazism in describing communist Russia relied upon the appearance of the Nazi atrocities in the media. The prime example of Nazi brutality came from the camp liberation films which misrepresented the danger of Nazi ideology by universalizing the suffering of the Nazi's victims and failing to address the atrocities in specifically anti-Semitic terms. These two factors allowed Nazism to be a symbol that was at once both powerful enough to rally American reaction and vague enough to allow for usage in propaganda outside of the limited scope of Nazi Germany—useful, especially, after the end of the Second World War. Stalin could easily be made to

seem like Hitler on the basis of their shared desire for world conquest, and in doing so, he could be associated with the images of camp liberation that exemplified evil many Americans.

Signs that this conflation would become an essential part of America's postwar image of Russia began almost immediately following the war. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945 in New York City, before the dawn of the Cold War, Harry Truman divided America's postwar role into twelve points. The fifth of these points concerned Nazism specifically: "By the combined and cooperative action of our war allies, we shall help the defeated enemy states establish peaceful democratic governments of their own free choice. And we shall try to attain a world in which Nazism, Fascism, and military aggression cannot exist" ("Harry" 343). Truman's speech sets the stage for America's postwar self image in that it charges the United States with the task of rescuing the world from Nazism in perpetuity. The nation's aim would be, according to Truman, to help stamp out future fascism just as we had stamped out the incarnation which had only recently been defeated. The United States, with the help of its allies, had defeated evil.

Points one through three of this same speech directly addressed invasive imperialism such as practiced by the Nazis, while point four (obviously directed at Communist Russia) would, ironically, have validated Nazi Germany: it allowed for any nation to choose its own leader, which Germany surely had done in 1932.

The problem with Truman's vision of America's postwar purpose was, of course, that the world no longer needed a defender against Nazism. Nazism had been defeated, both physically through the defeat of its followers and conceptually by the revelation that the ideology itself was intolerable. Nazism had been vilified through images of the atrocities

to such an extent that its existence as a serious political force was no longer conceivable, and fascism, if not defeated outright, had been thoroughly demonized<sup>38</sup>.

Nationalism, in the form of patriotism, was, however, still alive and well as evidenced in Truman's speech. According to Truman, America was to shoulder the responsibility for rescuing and defending the free world. It was empowered to do this because it had proven itself inherently virtuous. The task charged by Truman for America would soon after require the build up of a nuclear arsenal to enforce worldwide respect for freedom rather than tyranny. The Soviets would drop their answer to "Fat Man," dubbed "Joe One," in August of 1949<sup>39</sup>.

If the Nazis disappeared from the world physically and politically after their defeat in 1945, however, they certainly were not forgotten. Postwar, the dissemination of American culture would recall Nazism and America's fight against Nazi Germany compulsively. In the unofficial propaganda of American mass culture, World War II films and literature emerged as financially successful entertainment genre that had mass appeal across American geographic and cultural boundaries. Films inspired by the Second World War and especially the fight against Nazism would grossly outnumber films made about all other American conflicts combined and have since continued to remain popular.

At the beginning of the rise in popularity for depictions of Nazism, America's recurrent depiction of its recently defeated enemy was unsurprising. Historically, nations bolster up the patriotism of their citizenry through reminders of recent military victories; America was no different. These particular reminders were, however, odd in that they were produced concurrently with America's attempt to vilify its postwar ally, Communist

Russia. Strangely, that American propaganda, official or unofficial, which attempted to sell the Russian enemy without reference to the Nazis proved unsuccessful (and certainly could not compete with depictions of military victories over Nazi Germany) despite their topicality.

Overt attempts made during the war to rally Americans to the plight of their Russian allies undermined the effectiveness of once proven methods for demonizing communism which had been employed since the Russian revolution. The idea of the bomb throwing saboteur who went from factory to factory stirring up strife among workers had become hackneyed through overuse and its obvious contradictory message to the depictions disseminated during wartime of Russians as hardworking decent folk. American propaganda reinvigorated the threat of Communism by merging commies and Nazis into a single conglomerate enemy of America. The affect was to make communist and Nazi characteristics seemingly interchangeable. Thus, the defeats of the Nazis served American propaganda as symbolic references to hypothetical defeats of Russians, and communism took on the stigma of evil for being made to seem similar to Nazism.

Likewise, by conflating Russia with Nazi Germany, America reassured itself of the need to stand up against communism as a fight against inherent evil and in this way justified the excesses of the domestic anti-communism campaigns and its military obligations as a super power. Images of the defeat of Nazism, then, weren't just reminders of American combat valor but nationalist verifications of the ethical virtue inherent to being American. We had defeated the dragon of Nazism and he who slays the dragon becomes a dragon slayer.

This propaganda was clearly based on images and not historical veracity even as it came through official channels. Historically, Russia did as much to win World War II as America had, and in terms of sacrifice, Russia took more casualties than all the other warring nations combined. In terms of its capacity to make war after World War II, including nuclear war, Russia was far outstripped by the American military. Whether the Russian domestic or foreign policy actually resembled that of the Nazis is a position that is certainly subjective. In the movie theaters, however, communist Russia was defined for the American audience as a nation as virulently imperialistic, as given to violence, and as fanatical to ideology as Nazi Germany. They might, at any moment, drop a hydrogen bomb on Portland, Oregon or take over the free presses in some town in Montana. That the Russians would have had trouble delivering a nuclear or thermonuclear payload to American soil was not a factor in the effectiveness of Cold War rhetoric as disseminated to the mass American public through channels of propaganda that were both conscious and accidental, public and private.

Americans were reassured by their propaganda that they had wiped the world clean of Nazism and fascism almost single handedly. It assured them also that it was only natural that communism would be next. Because the images of the camps defied explanation, they were susceptible to re-contextualization. Propaganda utilized the tenuous lack of resolution implied by the atrocities to imply America's new enemy as well. Communist Russia was made to seem Nazi Germany, part II.

The threat of liquid powered rockets was deemphasized in the minds of the American public as soon as the V-2 launch sites fell silent. Even the implications of genocide, as introduced after the war, were forgotten in the various postwar forums of the American

mass media which preferred to identify the corpses in the camp as political dissidents and foreign patriots rather than innocent Jews. America had not received answers, but its media, nonetheless, stopped asking questions.

Issues raised by the war (the scope and nature of the atrocities, what to do with the refugees, what to do with the war criminals, etc.) were replaced, postwar, by the much more immediate threat of worldwide communism, the Iron Curtain, the Cold War, and the ever present possibility of, first, nuclear, and then thermonuclear, attack. Stalin and his H-Bomb left no time for meditation on the meaning of Buchenwald, except for when propaganda cryptically attempted to conflate the motivations of Buchenwald with the motivations of Russia's H-Bomb.

What is clear, however, is that the postwar communist caricature portrayed in American propaganda was foreign to its depiction in the long prewar tradition of vilifying communism. Whereas the prewar communist was a character gifted in the skills of oratory and demolitions (often of Jewish ethnicity), the new communist was a shadowy master who never appeared from behind his army of brainwashed slaves: the prewar communist was a zealous revolutionary indistinguishable from anarchists; the postwar communist was a war mongering overlord whose techniques included mind control, the closed border of the annexed state, the secret police that carried dissenters away in the night to parts unknown, and the capacity to incinerate entire populations, remotely and without mercy. The image of the Communist menace seemed a close cousin to the Nazis as described by Frank Capra in *Why We Fight*.

Communists were no longer depicted as interested in stirring up disgruntled workers into a piecemeal revolution, but rather wanted nothing less than the usurpation of the

entire world—bending everyone everywhere to their will by erasing their minds and replacing their thoughts and opinions with party ideology. The communist leadership was depicted in America of wanting to make soldiers who would burn the world in a great conflagration and who would do so without argument because they would always, and only, follow orders. In short they'd become Nazis.

The new communist was Orwell's totalitarian "boot stamping on a human face – forever" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 277). In fact, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* became the American literary touchstone for the Cold War precisely because it was taken as detailing how a totalitarian government, presumably communism, would operate if allowed. The mythical nation of Oceania in the novel is clearly meant to mix the dangers of communism and national socialism through its political orientation of English Socialism or Ingsoc.

The manner in which American agencies formed their anti-communist propaganda after World War II suggests the transformation from Nazi to Communist rather than a return to the old habit of fueling anti-Communist sentiments through America's prewar pattern. The open letter from Lenin to the American Worker in 1918 and the ensuing Palmer raids of 1920 which had led to the deportation 246 men and 3 women<sup>40</sup> to Russia had originally created the image of the Bolshevik as a political radical indistinguishable from an anarchist (Barson 19).

In a letter meant to counter Lenin's, Palmer explains the nature of communism as criminal:

“Robbery, not war, is the ideal of Communism. This has been demonstrated in Russia, Germany, and in America. As a foe, the anarchist is fearless of his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect of any other creed. Obviously it is the creed of any criminal mind, which reasons always from



motives impossible to clean thought. Crime is the degenerate factor in society...An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish.” (A. Mitchell Palmer 6).

What Palmer also suggests is that he couldn't distinguish between the strike-inciting communist and the bomb throwing anarchist. His description is indicative of the prewar conception of the communist—a robber, an assassin, an orator, but not a tyrant, a hypnotist, or a power mad imperialist.

The effect of the first Red Scare was native to the American desire for isolation following the First World War. Even after Palmer's political career ended (leaving Herbert Hoover in control of the FBI), anti-Communist sentiments continued to affect national policy. The victorious nations of the First World War, for instance, encouraged fascist nationalists<sup>41</sup> to compete for power in vulnerable nations because of their inherent anti-Bolshevist attitudes (Hobsbawn 31). The House UnAmerican Committee, set up in 1934 to investigate Nazi propaganda, changed 3 years later to examine, instead, the danger of communist infiltration.

Attitudes towards communism were, however, enormously divided in America. The Great Depression made the ideology attractive at least to people who were curious about its tenets, and throughout the thirties, anti-Communist sentiments were met with growing ambivalence. The film *Ninotchka*, for instance, which revolved around communist party politics and the interaction between the communist and capitalist world, was released six weeks after the signing Russians non-aggression pact with Germany. *Ninotchka* was “not only a commercial success, but was also nominated for several Academy Awards” (Barson 38). On its coattails, Hollywood released *Comrade X* (1940), another romance

between communist women and capitalist men, and also a commercial success.

Communism, even during this politically charged time, faced a rather tepid response by most Americans. According to Barson and Heller, “the fact that communism was only occasionally a focal point of American popular culture...is a tip-off that it was perceived rather ambiguously by much of the nation” (32).

By the time America entered the war in 1942, the era of the First Red scare had already ended with Russia as a watered down enemy. America’s entrance into the Second World War reinvigorated the American propaganda machine but put it in the awkward position of having to undo the image created by twenty years of red baiting and the employment of communists as the go-to enemies of the state. Film and print would require an immediate overhaul of this image if they were to convince the American public of the necessity of working alongside the enemy of democracy. This refitting would not only shape the nature of propaganda during the war, but it would usher in a new mode of creating a national enemy that would shape the postwar American propaganda landscape.

More thorough histories exist to cover the ways in which America turned the “Bomb Throwing Commies” into the “Heroes of Stalingrad” within the print and film media (as well as the postwar repercussion by the House Un-American Activities Committee against those who made pro-Russian propaganda during the war). Suffice it to say, every step made in the public arena towards closing the gap between America and Russia during the war, was a concession that would complicate the peacetime bellicose foreign policy of the U.S. towards Russia postwar. Hollywood had rallied to the war effort by portraying a Russian people who weren’t fundamentally different than most Americans

(though a bit more artistically and intellectually minded). This image was repeated in the respectable press.

The American media, during the war, seemed bent on fostering public sympathy for war-torn Russia. These depictions almost unanimously relied on the premise that, though communism was bad, the new communists loved their land like we loved ours, and hated oppression in the same way that we did. The Russians fought valiantly against Hitler so as to defend their homeland and repel foreign invaders. Additionally, the Soviet Union was sold to America as the extreme melting pot with its continent wide expanse of land from which to draw its ethnicities.<sup>42</sup> In short, America was urged to forgive them the naiveté of their communism.

Part of the promise of Russia as it was presented in the wartime movie theaters was that of a new citizenship coming to power a generation after the revolution. These new Russians were depicted as a people who might be open to the freedoms democracy had to offer, especially after seeing the denigrations of tyranny first hand while fighting back the Nazis. Political spin doctors predicted a backlash away from extremism to a more level-headed, and therefore American, view of politics.

The goal of the American cinema had never been to seriously or realistically explore Russian attitudes towards democracy. Instead, Hollywood quickly created an image of Russians with which Americans could identify and sympathize. It depicted the average Russian as being similar to the average American, save their political affiliation, and for this purpose, it was much easier to invent such Russians than it would have been to explain real Russians in these contexts.

This propaganda, however jarring its switch in tenor from that of the first Red Scare, succeeded in changing America's basic view of communist Russia, albeit briefly, from one of fear to one of hope. What it suggested was that we had been wrong about the commies, and they could be trusted and even admired. This new hope built off of American attitudes as reflected in the mass media and by members of America's intellectual community. After the war, it would be this new vision of Russia that stood in the way of reemploying prewar depictions of the communists when it turned out that they had no intention of becoming democratic, and instead, had designs on most of Eastern Europe. Hollywood had spoiled the possibility of the Russian on the factory floor spouting ideological nonsense and throwing bombs at prominent political figures.

The new depiction of the commie menace began in 1947 in response to the uncharacteristically sympathetic wartime depictions of Russia. The absorption of anti-Nazi rhetoric into anti-communist propaganda allowed America to demonize its new enemy in a novel way. Before the Nazis, the Russians had been, to some degree, dangerous, but Hitler and the reality of Nazi Germany's crimes had taught America to think of its various national causes and conflicts in terms of good and evil just as the images of camp liberation had set the national standard for that evil.

America drew upon its recent foe to construct propaganda that altered the communist enemy from its previous incarnation through the employment of an overarching ideological term: totalitarianism. Communism became evil after the Second World War because, like Nazism, it was totalitarian. To facilitate this conflation, however, the meaning of totalitarianism had to be changed from its previous meaning during the 1920s and 30s and made to take on the connotation of evil through a connection to Nazism. To

vilify Communism, then, American propaganda modified the idea of a totalitarian government and then depicted Russia's totalitarian leaders as using the ideology of communism to bring the nation's citizens under its control. The average Russian, who had been lionized during the war, was now depicted as a slave in the schemes of totalitarian masters<sup>43</sup>.

At its inception in 1926<sup>44</sup>, totalitarianism had a very specific political meaning (a government embraced so totally by its population that they surrendered their identity to it). The term had, more or less, been used in conjunction with Russia since the mid-30s. Before the end of the Second World War, however, the term lacked the degree of pejorative inference it would hold after the war. It was used in a complimentary term to refer to Mussolini, for instance, to indicate the degree of acceptance afforded his government by the people. Its usage suggested ubiquity or unanimity<sup>45</sup>. Nazi Germany sold itself to the rest of the world as a total state, a term which it used to denote efficiency, like Italy, ubiquitous acceptance by its citizenry, and finally the state's total responsibility to all aspects of its citizens' lives.<sup>46</sup>

Postwar, the definition of totalitarianism changed from a state unanimously supported by its citizens to something closer to its current meaning in which the state forced ideology unanimously upon its citizens through terror. This pejorative description was then ascribed to Nazi Germany under Hitler and Russia under the leadership in the Kremlin.

By delineating between totalitarian masters and their helpless victims, American postwar propaganda avoided invalidating the messages it disseminated about the Russian people during the wartime alliance even though the ally had since become the enemy.

The message as it related to Russia was simple: America had gone to war to secure the freedom of the Russian people but was betrayed in that endeavor, postwar, by their totalitarian leadership which held the country in thrall. In his 1946 speech to Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill admonishes Russia for the spread of the Soviet sphere (he introduces the all-too-familiar Cold War phrase “Iron Curtain”), but he begins by offering “deep sympathy and good will” to the Russian people: “Above all, we welcome constant, frequent, and growing contacts between the Russian people and our own people on both sides of the Atlantic” (Churchill 804). Thus, in a speech aimed at chastising the Russian leadership for pulling the world’s capitals away from Western eyes and into the nefariously silent political realm of soviet influence and after admonishing Soviet-run countries for instituting totalitarian regimes<sup>47</sup>, Churchill is careful to point out that his criticism has nothing to do with the Russians themselves, only their leadership.

The change of Totalitarianism’s definition was first made possible through the work of American political theorists trying to come to terms with the character of the defeated Nazis in light of the atrocities. Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* describes the totalitarian state as a result of a mass disillusionment against the structures that differentiate society. According to Arendt’s view, because of calamity, the individual ceases to see him or herself as loyal to a differentiated group and reacts by heaping derision on the power structures that follow from or support such differentiation. As soon as the individual comes to believe that the governing political group, kept in power through differentiation, has lost its capacity to rule, it is attacked by its members,

en masse, who blame the ruling system for a prevailing sense of hopelessness and isolation.

Arendt's study of totalitarianism was seminal in that it represented the culmination of political theory concerning totalitarianism up until its publication. She formulates totalitarianism as the result of mass disillusionment which leads first to an adverse individualism (breeding loneliness and helplessness), then to the scapegoating of a recently disempowered social or political group, then to mass uprising as the individualism is purged, then finally, to surrender of all aspects of the life of the individual as the cause cements itself into a totalitarian regime. Thus, absorption of the individual into the mass is total.

Arendt's general political analysis, however, reveals its Nazi roots. Despite her assertion that the choice of scapegoats is arbitrary, the first third of her book explaining totalitarianism is devoted to anti-Semitism—which inevitably links the totalitarianism with anti-Semitism through intellectual scholarship. Moreover, even as Arendt explained totalitarianism in terms of a popular movement carried to a nightmarish extreme, both political fiction and theory continued to contradict the basic definitions of her analysis (though it claimed to absorb her work as an intellectual basis). Despite Arendt, Totalitarianism came to be decreasingly defined by a citizenry voluntarily surrendering their individuality en masse by becoming swept up in the cause. Instead focus shifted towards an indictment of a small cadre of the ideologically elite who forced the masses to accept a government based in fear.

Those responsible for providing definitions of totalitarianism in popular culture resisted the idea of populism gone mad and preferred a despotic reign of terror. In use,

the term favored the latter of the definitions. Eventually, the reason depicted for the loss of individuality became irrelevant. Whether dissent was impossible given the attractiveness of the cause, or made to seem so at gunpoint—whether the surge towards totalitarianism was the mandate of the people, the party, or the dictator—so long as individuality was lost, the governing ideology was labeled totalitarian.

The common term created a standard for dealing with the non-cadre populations of the totalitarian nations, presumably to free them from censure concerning the propaganda created on their behalf on one hand, and the crimes carried out in their name on the other. The common citizenry of a totalitarian regime, under the original definition of the term, could not be exonerated. If Nazi Germany were the result of mass action, then the masses were guilty and could not be turned into allies postwar. Moreover, if Russia was the result of mass action, then the masses which had been lionized would need to be demonized—a propaganda trick that simply wasn't possible.

In placing blame on a smaller group of ideological supporters that America could demonize and blame for the totalitarian regime, the U.S. could make enemies, post-war out of the governments of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia but not the Germans or the Russians themselves. The Russians could be exonerated of their leaders' ideological mindset, and be seen as brainwashed victims, precisely because this was the post-war view of Germans who had ceased to be Nazis and were now simply a nation that would need to be carved up and cared for.

The recently defeated Nazi Germany was held up as the prime example of this new model of totalitarianism, and because of this exemplification, it also acted as proof that a totalitarian government could be dismantled and its citizenry rescued from its influence.



Dealing with Germany's crimes, using this revised definition, allowed the allies to centralize blame and avoid the legislative and logistical nightmare of trying to punish everyone involved in the genocide.

While the comparison between Communist Russia and Nazi Germany required the third term of Totalitarianism, the term as it had originally been defined, or even its redefinition by people like Karl Popper and Hannah Arendt,<sup>48</sup>, simply could not simultaneously hold for America's attitudes towards both of the Totalitarian states it needed to demonize. There was no ideological basis for comparison between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia; the two ideologies saw themselves as opposed to one another. Communism was as natural an enemy to the Nazis as were the Jews;<sup>49</sup> the communists themselves were some of the first of the Nazi's enemies to be rounded up and put into camps<sup>50</sup>.

Totalitarianism makes such a comparison possible without being hampered by the specifics of ideology. In truth, ambiguity is central to the concept of the term totalitarianism which has had a long history of theoretical shifts in its definition that its only current solidity seems to be that it refers to the governments of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Totalitarianism, like fascism or democracy for George Orwell, is a term useful as universal pejorative precisely because its meaning is fluid and dependent on its usage.

Cold war propaganda acquainted America with the designs and dangers of its current totalitarian adversary by equating it with the designs and dangers of its previous totalitarian adversary—the most immediately recognizable to the American public was the totalitarian proclivity towards world domination by which America had been initially

convinced to enter war in Europe. The Soviets' attempt to set up communist governments in Eastern Europe and Asia were depicted by America in this language: first, that it was a power grab for domination of Europe, and second that such power grabs were reminiscent of Nazism<sup>51</sup>. As it was conceived by the majority of Americans, expansive world domination defined the totalitarian mindset towards the rest of the world. Some critics, such as William Henry Chamberlain, went so far as to claim that Russia, in allying itself with the U.S., succeeded in achieving Germany's wartime goals: Hitler had won the war—"in the person of Stalin" (Chamberlin 342).<sup>52</sup>

Against such an enemy, America would need to remain constantly on guard for the belligerence of their foe, as Truman had warned, and the enemy would need to be envisioned always as a military adversary, not just in a time of war, but in times of relative peace as well. As the notion of a Cold War came into being in 1947<sup>53</sup>, the U.S. was preparing to treat "the peace" as an era of global military maneuvering against the Soviet Union to be characterized by an arms race, occasional hot zones of combat (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan), virulent espionage tactics, and a philosophy of Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D.) regarding the stockpiling of nuclear and, then, thermonuclear weaponry. The point was to be prepared at any moment to face the enemy and the model for that enemy was Nazi Germany—a nation which might, at any moment, launch an attack.

This interchangeability was mirrored in political rhetoric. Where totalitarian had already been reduced from a kind of rogue populism, locating its origins in the masses, to a subset of despotism, locating its origin in a political elite or finally in a tyrant, usage of the term reduced its meaning further. Totalitarianism, in usage, came to be associated

with only two governments: that of Nazi Germany and that of Communist Russia. At first, these two nations were used as examples of totalitarianism, but their exclusive use in this role, produced the effect that these two nations were the only totalitarian governments.<sup>54</sup> According to Benjamin Alpers:

“By 1945 the term “totalitarianism” had established a firm foothold in American political culture. Its meaning had become in some ways extremely clear, and yet in others it remained entirely protean. What was unambiguous about it was that it referred to Nazi Germany *and* the Soviet Union, and that it was highly pejorative...The protean quality of “totalitarianism” can be seen in virtually every other aspect of the term.”  
(251)

Totalitarianism became a political ideology that had examples but no definition, and thus, empowered propaganda with great ease by simply lumping Nazism and Communism together as dual faces of a single enemy. Whether one considered Communist Russia to be the natural offspring of Nazi Germany or whether Nazi Germany was simply the first symptom of what would become Communist Russia, the two nations were utterly interchangeable. Propaganda against one worked just as well to vilify the other.

That the conflation of Nazi and Communist ideology is absurd is a problem avoided through the use of totalitarianism and its self-referential definition. What is particularly evil about these states is implied, but unspoken, so that either may share the villainy of the implication. The nebulous nature of totalitarianism insured that specific evils like genocide could not be a definitive feature of the totalitarian state (because the Soviets did not commit genocide), nor is belief in racial stratification, deification of the nation state, fascism, potential nuclear attack, atheism, closed borders, or democracy<sup>55</sup>. Where Russia abandoned religion, Nazi Germany looked to tracts by Martin Luther to support its

homicidal racism. Where Nazi Germany turned to fascist nationalism, Russia supported a worldwide workers revolution across national borders.

The vast differences between the two nations would suggest that Nazi Germany and Communist Russia should not be categorized together, but the definition of totalitarianism allowed for an avoidance of these particulars in favor of an ambiguously defined category. Yet still, Russia was like Nazi Germany which had committed the Holocaust. Russia controlled its citizenry through an elite cadre of political ideologues and Nazi Germany was like Russia. The two nations were condemned as a vaguely defined totalitarian amalgamation over loaded with implications, and as totalitarianism was presented as the “demonic Other of democracy,” its condemnation was an act of patriotism (Alpers 301).

Postwar, the military presence of Nazi Germany survived in the imaginations of the American public requiring the U.S. to prepare itself to fight against Nazis in perpetuity and at a moment’s notice. Specifically, this variety of a militant national identity was necessary because the foes of America had transformed to a new, more dangerous, variety that premiered with the Nazis and continued, in totalitarian kind, with the Soviets—the totalitarian economic machine made continuous preparations for war and so those who defended against it would need to be equally prepared.

It was the idea of Russia as a totalitarian state that provided the necessary vilification of the nation by contextualizing the danger of its arsenal. Russia might be forgiven this buildup of conventional weaponry, and possibly even its nuclear weaponry, if America were convinced that a rational body was governing Soviet Russia and its military resources, but a totalitarian regime that forced its citizens to embrace Godless

communism, starved cities behind blockades, and threatened to make spies out of our neighbors and children simply could not be trusted. The Iron Curtain across Europe was political evidence of their desire to conquer and corrupt; it exemplified what Winston Churchill called “their expansive and proselytizing tendencies” (804). Instead of the world wide worker’s revolution, called for in the communist manifesto, the Russians had become bent on total world domination—they planned to force capitalists out of power and needed no uprising of the proletariat to do it.

The wartime depiction of the Russian people as similar to Americans, was, in a limited way continued after the war because it amplified the implied danger of the Soviet Total state and its employment of communism. If they could be made to embrace Communism, the propaganda suggested, so could we. Sympathy for the Russians became a sign of weakness towards their ideology which could be exploited by communist infiltrators and red organizers.

To obviate this danger, propaganda made reference often to what Nazi Germany, a comparable totalitarian regime, had been capable of convincing their citizens to do. Routinely the American anti-communist propaganda conjectured about life in communist Russia by employing images drawn from Hitler’s Germany. In the 1952 Coronet Instructional film “Communism,” for instance, the narrator’s words “traitors may be immediately executed or sent off to prison” is paralleled on screen with a railway car being filled with people followed immediately by an image of prisoners in a camp behind a barbed wire fence.

Finally, the anti-Communist propaganda suggested a marked difference between the Russian state and ours. If our people were like their people, and we lived differently than

they did, it could only be because our government was not totalitarian. Thus any similarity one might see between the communist Russian state and the government of the United States of America was illusory—we were not like them, they were like the Nazis; to say otherwise marked one as a communist sympathizer, a fellow traveler, or an enemy of the state.

The combination of Russia and Nazi Germany together into a single ideology allowed the U.S. propaganda community to create a freely applicable image which could be called forth whenever anti-Soviet sentiments were needed, especially given that the greatest of these fears was nuclear attack. Jacques Derrida has pointed out that one of the defining characteristics of nuclear destruction is its embeddedness within the world of narrative<sup>56</sup>. Because nuclear war has not yet occurred, all aspects of it arise from the language used to describe it and the language it threatens to destroy. This creates an amazingly rich critical framework with which to discuss nuclear Armageddon but what it doesn't do is provide real examples from which to draw what Nietzsche described as "monumental history."<sup>57</sup> America required historical examples of Soviet villainy for its anti-Soviet sentiments, but it had no examples that are relevant enough to serve.<sup>58</sup>

Russia's danger was only a potential because it hadn't launched any of its missiles. At best, America had the bomb throwing anarchists who had incited the Palmer raids to remind the public about the danger of communism, but they certainly weren't enough to incite national panic especially for a nation that had recently seen the horrors of Nazi Germany. If, on the other hand, Communist Russia and Nazi Germany were conflated through totalitarianism, examples became immediately available for state sponsored propaganda and the incidental propaganda associated with films, television, and print.

The newsreel film *1947: Year of Division* (1947) demonstrates the way that anti-Communist propaganda at its inception had to navigate the lack of real Russian atrocities by which to vilify the America's new enemy. The film manages a depiction of the dangers associated with communism by showing a real American town pretending to turn communist. It simulates the danger of infiltration and centers it on small town life—the uncorrupted heart of America. In this simulation, the film's pretend commissar and his cronies arrest the chief of police, form a bread line, stop the local press, and form a pro-Stalin parade offering, as they pass the cameras, the Nazi salute.

This final touch to the film is obviously unintentional, and yet, extraordinarily telling. The director of the film, or perhaps its actors, when asked to call to mind what it would be like to be taken over by an evil government instinctively raise their hand to the camera. The Nazis are their vision of an evil government, and in expressing cultural values through this simulation, they naturally phrase their beliefs in the rhetoric of Nazism despite the fact that they are supposed to be play acting the part of Communist converts. The film predates Arendt's conflation of communism and Nazism by 4 years and represents a natural supposition concerning the two ideologies that would later be elucidated, explored, and analyzed. Even without the backing of theoretical reasoning, however, the Nazis had already, by 1947, become definitive of evil through the images of their atrocities.

Once the relationship between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia became codified in the term totalitarianism, the American propaganda changed to reflect the value systems deemed indicative of the theoretical framework. Usage of totalitarianism, such as in Churchill's speech for instance, differentiated between totalitarian masters and

a slave like populace. This difference is explained by the narrator of the 1952 Coronet educational film *Communism*:

But what about the people? The proletarian who had fought to win a new world? Their 'new world' might look promising, but though the land had been taken away from the capitalists, the workers didn't get it. Under communism, virtually everything belongs to the state. The individual has little right to own property or to plan his own life—he's told where to work and his employer—little freedom to leave his job or seek a new profession. Whereas we believe, and our religions teach, that the individual is all important, communism denies religion and debases the individual to a part of a vast machine that powers the state.

The dichotomy here is pronounced, obviously, so that the communist government is the victimizer and the people its victim—the ideology of communism is nothing but the means of oppression for totalitarian overlords. The individuality of the average Russian is burned away through its crucible.

The Coronet film makes mention of religion so as to remind its viewers that the communists are godless—their subjugation has robbed them of their souls. Ultimately, the totalitarian leadership, through the ruse of communism, renders its subjects into pieces of a political machine, limits their potential as human beings to that function, and then cuts off their connection to spiritual salvation.

The language of the Coronet film is indicative of the ways in which the tenor of anti-Russian rhetoric had changed after the Berlin airlift and the failure of the Marshall plan to secure peace in Europe. It had become evident that the post-war world would not be shared by the victorious powers but would fall into political "spheres of influence." After that point, the danger represented by Communist Russia began to be phrased in a language of morality, the stakes of the battle in terms of a holy war, and the combatants in the rhetoric of the saintly and the demonic. The rhetoric of the propaganda fell back



on the tone used to describe Nazism near the end of the war, after the atrocities had been discovered.

Notably, the language also follows the pre-war pattern of utopian and dystopian thinking. It is clear from the narration, for instance, that liberality invites tragedy and that traditional values are a necessary component for a moral society. The logic of the anti-Communist rhetoric in the newsreels follows from the essentialist philosophies that would become increasingly challenged through the same vehicle of Nazi analogy. These early films show, however, that this tension was not immediately recognizable in the circles of official state-sponsored propaganda.

The lack of anti-communist monumental history to validate the tone of the anti-Communist newsreels was handled through the use of the hypothetical attack scenarios much as had been used in *1947: The Year of Division*. By 1949, these scenarios included two particular kinds of dangers: the first, ideological corruption like that of *1947*, and the second the demonstration of what would happen to America in the case of nuclear war. In *A Day Called X* (1957), for instance, a staged attack on Portland, Oregon is documented so as to show how civil defense and a calm mind will insure the survival of an attack by hydrogen bomb. At multiple points throughout the film, words are put up on the screen to alert the audience that “An Attack Is Not Taking Place.” The movie is only the recording of a drill. Still, it promises to show what people would do (or should do) in case of atomic attack.

What one detects immediately from the film is the sheer unreality of it. People calmly pack up their belongings and head off to a bomb shelter to wait out the devastation. Various agencies set up means of controlling civic functions from remote

locations. “Then there’s men like Tom Cook who can’t go. He’s one of the power load dispatchers for all electric power in the Northwest. These men are expendable.”

Amazingly, Tom’s reaction to his imminent destruction, as well as his unfortunate expendability, is one of calm. Of course, realistically, all of the people in Portland Oregon would probably be vaporized by a Hydrogen bomb—their calm and its appropriateness are only a function of the film as propaganda.

The film can, of course, do nothing by way of showing the effect of an actual nuclear attack because it has no idea what such an attack would look like. The danger and destruction it shows are hypothetical, even laughable, as the film attempts to show viewers what real people, not actors (the film stresses this point in its introduction), will do in the case of a bombing attack, but fails because these real people have no guide to let them know how they should act. The best that they can manage is a kind of morbid efficiency by not reacting to their imminent destruction. As the end draws nigh, the city of Oregon fades out and the narrator Glenn Ford comes back onto screen to offer, “what happened after that moment, we leave you to contemplate.” The audience’s guess is as good as the narrators.

Between 1947 and 1957, a change has already occurred in the manner in which the Communist threat is to be discussed. The action of *A Day Called X* does not reinforce tradition except for a vague notion of citizenship. The people calmly act through their jobs and routines either in the hope of ensuring their survival or the survival of their loved ones. They do not particular advocate for a vision of utopia that is either liberal or conservative. At best it’s utilitarian: if the citizens of Oregon do their job, they will live. In a way, this already seems to bespeak a manner of reacting to the world on a case-by-

case basis as the day called X, when it occurs, will cause the routine to usurp all previous value systems. The situation is hardly liberal, though, in the sense implied by Rorty. In the film, Tom Cook can't have an open mind about his job or else the entire Western seaboard may lose power.

Ultimately, official state sponsored propaganda relied on essentialist and nationalist methods of making value despite their similarity to Nazi philosophy or the images of camp liberation that had made such methods suspect. It simplified the conflict as a nationalist struggle of 'us' against 'them' with increasingly less specific details about what it was about American values that made them more worthwhile (except that they were American).

Because Cold War propaganda employed the powerful image system of World War II to incite the patriotic fervor of their readers and viewers, the American public became acclimated to the use of Nazism in political arguments related to their enemies even if the exact logic of those analogies was less than cogent. Not surprisingly, the state began to incorporate these analogies into its statements to justify official foreign and domestic policy to the very Americans who were audience to these films. In an oft-quoted comment concerning the structure of the military industrial complex, for instance, President Dwight D. Eisenhower offered the American public this sentiment in his 1961 farewell address:

*Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. ("Transcript" emphasis added)*

By situating his critique in reference to the “latest of our world conflicts,” Eisenhower is effectively suggesting that the arms stockpiling of the Cold War is a continuation of practices put into place to fight Nazi Germany fifteen years prior.

The military industrial complex, critiqued by Eisenhower, was engineered to make America a viable participant in the Second World War. In actuality, the fight against Nazi Germany had changed the way that America conducted war because it fundamentally changed the way America imagined a threat to its “way of life” by modeling such a threat on the fanatical “Total War” campaign of the Nazis, but it also changed the way America sold war to its citizenry. Eisenhower’s reference to World War II is both anachronistic and paradoxically apropos. The method in which America prepared to fight against communists had nothing substantive in common with its fight against Nazi Germany except that such a fight could not be validated otherwise.

Certainly the danger of combat with the Russians (generally sold as World War III), even if ambiguous, was horrifying, because America did not know what the Russians might do; the horror was that they might do anything. But it did not serve attempts to depict communists as inhuman when the devilry of the Russians was only some hinted at potential or the result of a hypothetical scenario; anyone and anything might turn dangerous in theory.

Propaganda is most effective when it stems from villainy that is part of the historic record—the more widely known, the better. Condemnation of Russia needed to come from crimes or atrocities that had actually been committed but those crimes were few and far between, happened behind the Iron Curtain, and were otherwise unavailable. In associating Communist Russia with Nazi Germany, however, propaganda gained an

entire language and image system which had potential to serve as reminders of real atrocities.

In another short work of propaganda, *Red Nightmare* (1962), a Twilight Zone-esque nightmare is created in which the film's main character awakes in a town gone Communist. Unlike *A Day Called X*, the film does not concentrate on the devastation of atomic attack. Instead, *Red Nightmare* explores the hypothetical horror of an America that one day, while the story's hero sleeps, turns communist. Like *1947: The Year of Division*, the film hopes to show what would happen to small town America gone Red, and with the same problem, its creators do not know what a "Red town" would look like. Main Street is guarded by sand bag bunkers, barbed wire, and machine gun nests. One cannot use the phone without a permit number from the commissar and everywhere one looks, there are uniformed and armed men sporting jack boots and looking suspiciously like Nazi guards. The communist town looks like a prison camp. Every street corner is a Check Point Charlie. Eventually, the hero of *Red Nightmare* is turned into the local authorities by his children who have already begun indoctrination into party politics through youth groups (reminiscent of the Hitler Youth).

Interestingly enough, the reason that Jerry Donovan, the hero of *Red Nightmare* has his Red Nightmare is because he doesn't want to go to a community meeting. He is, according to narrator Jack Webb, "proud of his country, but prone to take his liberties for granted. He's aware that someone must assume responsibility for those liberties and for our free way of life. Yet, when there's a job to be done, Jerry, like so many Americans is apt to ask, 'why me?'" Not only does the film suggest American nationalist values—American citizenship as opposition to Communist—but it suggests that this citizenship

must be enacted specifically in that opposition. The movie implies that if Jerry Donovan doesn't do his part to make America safe, the communists will take over.

Jerry has no options on how to act. If he, for instance, chooses not to go to a community meeting, he's all but allied himself with the Communist. In this way, the utopian vision of the film is clearly not liberal, but then, neither is it conservative in that it doesn't make a case for traditional values. If Jerry Donovan doesn't hate communists enough to go to a community meeting, then he is endangering the infiltration of America by Communists.

Interestingly, these films share a similar reduction of Communist and anti-Communist sentiments to absurdity. The communists, as depicted in state sanctioned anti-Communist propaganda like *1947: Year of Division* or *Red Nightmare*, have very little definition of their character except that they are opposed to the American way of life. What attitudes or habits they have that further mark them as un-American make them, at the same time, appear to be Nazis.

While these films consistently evoke the word "freedom" to describe the American way of life, American attitudes were generally depicted as contingent upon their anti-Communist function. In *A Day Called X*, Tom, as a good American, must go to his grave in the case of a nuclear attack. He has no freedom when the air-raid sirens sound. Jerry, as a good American, has to gather with other members of his community to stop the spread of communism. He is not free to idly sit on his couch and enjoy his favorite show on television. Thus these films convey the reflexive idea that Communists wants to destroy the American way of life which consists principally of anti-Communist activities. Within this simplified and self-refuting polarity, Nazi imagery serves to provide

justification for the good guys' goodness and the bad guys' badness. The Nazi cosmetic characteristic of the argument serves as the only justification that the films offer for the tension between Communist and anti-Communist forces, aside from, of course, nuclear annihilation which is, also, described through a kind of Nazi metaphor: nuclear holocaust.

Though short state-sponsored propaganda films accustomed American audiences to the threat of communism, their manner of treating the subject reduced American virtue to a simplified and somewhat outmoded nationalism. They had little to offer Americans whose relationship with essentialist philosophy was becoming more complex through increased interrogation of what it meant to have beaten Nazi Germany, rampant nationalism, imperialism, and to a lesser degree racism.

America's increasing interrogation of essential values was reflected, instead, in private feature-length films which were driven economically by the mass viewing public to address the particular desires of that audience. State sponsored propaganda could operate outside of a business model—it needn't have made money to be successful—and thus, it was not necessary for the film makers to temper their propaganda with what the American public would 'buy' about the threat of communism. These films, therefore, say more about what government agencies wanted Americans to think about communists, and less about how Americans actually wanted to think about this threat. The private film industry, at the same time, took up similar anti-Communist sentiments as those voiced in official state propaganda but in ways which reflected these increasingly complex relationships recognized by the American public. Their financial success depended on giving American film viewers a version of the communist threat that they were willing to pay to see.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MATINEE WAR: SELLING THE WAR AGAINST COMMUNISM WITH WORLD WAR II

State Sponsored propaganda provided depictions of communism (heavily influenced by American assumptions about the Nazis) in order to elucidate the dangers of the communist threat to the American way of life. In this way, these films were direct in their anti-communist sentiments even when they were not always accurate concerning what it was about the communists that made them dangerous to the American status quo. More often than not, Americans were told, through political analogies, that the communists were dangerous because they were like Nazis. These films were distributed to schools and shown before feature films to a captive audience; they were not commercially distributed. No one bought a ticket to see *A Day Called X*.

Feature films released during the Cold War, especially during the decades of the 50s and 60s, suggest that depictions of the threat of communism weren't particularly successful either commercially or critically despite their being released during an enormous state-sponsored propaganda campaign and during a time when the threat of communism was a definitive factor in the operation and development of American Culture. America feared the communist enemy, especially in the possibility of the Hydrogen Bomb, but nonetheless, this fear only occasionally manifested at the box office in films that directly addressed this threat. Had film makers seen the Red Scare as a business opportunity, one would expect to see numerous movies about communism, the



communist threat, or the horrors of communist Russia. The lack of these movies in American theaters at the time suggests that, in fact, film makers of that era did not see the Red Scare as a particularly fecund subject for financially successful movies. Movies released during that time involving patriotism and national enemies dramatically favored depictions of America's wartime enemies instead.

Though there were some exceptions, of the many anti-Communist films made during this era, most have since faded into obscurity. Even at their release, however, anti-Communist films received little fanfare from America's movie going public. Though films like *I Married a Communist* (1949), *The Red Menace* (1949), *The Iron Curtain* (1948), and the strange note in John Wayne's career, *Big Jim McLain* (1952) were released to capitalize on the early furor surrounding postwar Russia, Hollywood soon realized that World War II combat movies were more viable financially than movies about the evils of Communism. Movies set in and about the Second World War essentially capitalized on the inherent virtue that went along with military victory, and by doing so, provided Americans with a sense of their own valor and nobility as they entered into a fight against their new enemy. The fact that World War II movies were more popular and made in greater abundance than movies about the threat of communism suggests that America wanted reminders of the virtue they had earned through victory in World War II more than they wanted explanations of their enemy's villainy.

In this way, American culture sold the Cold War through the vehicle of World War II. Nazism was evoked to remind Americans that their way of life was worth defending through war and often by making the ultimate sacrifice. As the Cold War became an increasingly complex subject for Americans, the culture began to create films and

literature that advocated against military aggression and especially against the use of nuclear weaponry. What's interesting is that, though the anti-war movement generally opposed the foreign policies of the state in regards to its various conflicts world wide, this opposition was voiced in a pattern firmly established through pro-war propaganda: if Nazis could be used to sell war, then they proved equally employable for selling peace.

The usefulness of Nazi comparisons both for and against war is worth extended analysis particularly because it suggests that these comparisons had a utility beyond that of patriotic propaganda, and therefore, beyond that of just the dominant culture. That the symbol of Nazi evil could be used equally by both the dominant and the counter culture suggests that the symbol had national appeal, but more so, if the symbol was used differently by different groups, it suggests that the meaning of the symbol was subject to change through usage.

To illustrate these important points, then, it is necessary to look to a few key roles in which the Nazis served, symbolically, to sell war and then to sell peace. By examining these roles, I hope to highlight not only the function of Nazism but also the means by which that function, and therefore the symbol's meaning, changed depending on its usage. A few key questions pertaining to this usage will serve to accentuate these characteristics. First, we must ask the obvious question of why the threat of communism was better represented through comparisons to Nazism than by actual depictions of the threat of communism. Second, if references to World War II served to sell war against the communists, then why was the European theater more useful in this capacity than the Pacific theater given that both major wars waged by the United States against communism were in Asia? Taken together, these two questions address the same point:

that America chose to depict its enemies through the increasingly anachronistic metaphor of Nazism when more current and more appropriate depictions of the nation's enemies were possible. This suggests that, for Americans, depictions of Nazism were more compelling than even the threat of nuclear annihilation in stirring national fervor towards America's foreign policy. Third and last, we must ask how depictions of Nazism informed the American public's ideas about the nature of evil such that these depictions could be used both as descriptions of the Communist enemy and also as depictions of the evils of war against that Communist enemy?

The first of these questions has already been partially addressed in the previous chapter. The communist enemy, in state sponsored propaganda, was vilified as totalitarian and was, thus, compared to Nazi Germany through a tenuous definition particularly because wartime had made direct vilification of the Russian people difficult and had made previous methods of vilifying communism passé. Straining against the lack of original reasons for why America should fear the communists, American propaganda suggested that Russia's leaders were dangerous in the same manner as Nazi Germany's leaders—that they were both totalitarian and, therefore, dangerous.

The term 'totalitarianism,' however, came to increasingly have only a pejorative meaning: a government which resembled Communist Russia and Nazi Germany. For the term to have any other, more specific meaning, would have been to render it useless in describing the similarity between Communist Russia and Nazi Germany needed as fuel for anti-communist propaganda. As discussed in the previous chapter, the term, in being vague, allowed the new enemy, Russia, to be compared to Nazi Germany, and thereby, gave Americans reasons to hate Russia when no better reasons were immediately clear.

The lack of depictions of communist evil cannot be overstressed. Despite a national hysteria against Communism, neither literature nor film made a great showing as to what America should fear from communist takeover. The great novel of the anti-communist canon is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which was embraced by Americans and made required reading in a large number of American public schools. Despite its popularity as a Cold War vision of dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not about what might happen if Russia got its way—it's about the dangers of English Socialism (Ingsoc). The totalitarian government of the novel, whatever else it might be, is home grown. Clearly, the government of the fictional nation of Oceania (under the guise of Big Brother) is totalitarian, but beyond that designation, it's unclear whether the novel is an indictment of communism or fascism. In fact, one of the important features of the novel is that it mixes the two ideologies together under the single definition of totalitarianism, just what American propaganda was attempting to do in its state sponsored films.

The vagaries of the definition of totalitarianism, as the term had come to be used in American propaganda, suggests the universal power of Nazism as a symbol for evil: if the only consistent definition of the term 'totalitarianism' was that it implied a similarity to Nazism, then anything that might be comparable to Nazism was, by this implied definition, totalitarian. Furthermore, as was so often pointed out in anti-war rhetoric, if Russia was totalitarian for being like the Nazis, and America was totalitarian for being like the Nazis, then Russia and America weren't so different from each other.

Interestingly, some counter cultural groups operating during the 60s, preferring Russia to America because of socialist leanings, employed the image of America as fascist rather than totalitarian—a term which generally denoted the attitudes of Nazi

Germany (and generally not Italy which was historically fascist) and which excluded Russia from the comparison. These groups are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Nonetheless, outside of Orwell, and a few box office flops there are very few other novels and films about the Red Menace to accompany the cultural era and hysteria known by Cold War historians as the Second Red Scare. The communist bogeymen that drove the excesses of that era are strangely missing, and when existent, are curiously unsuccessful. The economic failure of anti-communist art, and the preeminence of narrative art (film, literature, comic books, etc.) set in World War II, suggests that the part of the communists in the American imagination was being played by the Nazis.

Reasons for this idiosyncrasy range from the mundane to the ideological. The most urbane reason for the rise of World War II films during the Cold War is related to the censure of war reportage during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Media, books and films especially, which concentrated on the current war were prohibited for distribution to soldiers on base—the very men who were generally seen as audiences for these media. Men's magazines like *Real Adventure*, *Man's Book*, and *True Men* turned to stories of combat in previous wars in absentia. In anti-Nazi fiction, the transient nature of the Nazi is obvious. Throughout the fifties and sixties, the cover of men's magazines promised tales of evil communists and Nazis almost interchangeably. "Many of the stories in *Man's*, *All Male*, *Men's Stories*, and *Siren* were originally about Nazis; only the uniforms were changed" (Barson 12). In terms of patriotic comic books, the arch villain of *Captain America*, The Red Skull, who had been a Nazi all throughout WWII when the comic book had been distributed to American GIs, became a communist at the end of the

40s. Captain America went out of business before the 1950s when there were no more Nazis left to fight. Collins and Hagenauer point out another reason that WWII stories predominated: “it was a war the United States had won” (236). Thus, stories that concentrated on WWII were simply more marketable to people directly involved in American combat.

Members of the military, however, constituted only one kind of audience for World War II films. Censorship did not extend to civilian theaters. Movies about the Korean conflict could have been released to the mass audience off-base, but no movie about, and released during, the Korean conflict had the commercial success of their World War II competition at the box office. *The Bridges of Toko Ri*, for instance, was a commercial success and was based on a book written during the Korean conflict but it was released after the Korean conflict and after censorship would have prevented its viewing. Its main competition at the Academy Awards that year was *The Caine Mutiny*—a film set during World War II.

Though the Korean War had not been won in the way that the United States had won World War II, movies released during the Korean conflict had the potential to face the ongoing drama of war with far more immediacy. While it was still being conducted, the Korean conflict could have provided prime examples of American valor working directly against a communist enemy, but the Korean conflict was never employed for this task. Instead American film hearkened back to the World War II.

Veterans of the Second World War were willing to pay to see more of that particular war on screen. They were not as willing to pay to see other wars. Men awaiting combat in Korea wanted movies about the Second World War, as did adolescents, adults, and

occasionally the American Film Academy. While other wars had been won by the U.S., men's magazines rarely ran stories about WWI or the Spanish-American war nor did Hollywood make many movies about these wars. The Alamo had a certain appeal to younger viewers, but it was nothing as compared to WWII for a mass American audience.

In Jeanine Basinger's work on World War II combat films, she explores a basic idea that their popularity was related, initially, to their ability to answer wartime questions for their audience: questions about whether we can win the war and how, whether fighting is ever necessary, what made the enemy "the enemy," etc. She suggests that to answer these questions, the movies had to define Americanism. "What did it mean to be American? What was America's history, and who were her heroes? We had to think about what nice guys we were, and about how we always played fair and about how much we liked our moms and apple pie" (Basinger 79). According to Basinger after the war, World War II combat films continued to be popular because of their ability to answer different questions for a world that was no longer at war. WWII movies offer a serious meditation on what qualifies as a good life, what makes a struggle valiant, if and how reintegration is possible, and the capability of a person and society to forgive.

Basinger abandons her first line of questions because they relate directly to the war, and at war's ends, she assumes that America no longer needs wartime answers. What she ignores in her assumptions is that, because of the Cold War, America does not find itself in a lasting peace after World War II, and thus, the nation never gets a reprieve from its wartime questions. In World War II such questions were, naturally, answered by WWII war films, but the use of these films to answer wartime questions in different conflicts is

anachronistic, especially when the film's echo neither the geography, the ethnicity, religion, nor the political ideology of the enemy. These are, historically, the reasons that nations enter into war against one another. That these anachronisms and incongruities were tolerated and even encouraged by the American public suggests that the fight against Nazi Germany answered questions about its wartime identity, like those posed by Basinger, better than could the fight against other, more appropriate, enemies. If the purpose of these films is to answer a nation's questions about the virtue of its patriotic identity, then their purpose is, first, to evoke that patriotism and then to depict it as culminating in its fight against Nazism: America was, as far as popular opinion was concerned, at its best when it fought against Hitler.

For a moment, it might do well to think of this problem from another angle: what was it about Nazis that made them inherently good villains in the cold war. After all, the two major hotspots of action in the Cold War were both in Asia. The enemies in both those conflicts were Asian. In terms of stirring up national fervor against those enemies, reminders of America's involvement against an Asian enemy during the Second World War are appropriate—reminders of America's involvement against Germans are not. Events like the Eichmann trial (1962), television shows like the *Holocaust* mini-series (1978), and films like *Schindler's List* (1993), and to a lesser extent, *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), produce an image of Nazi Germany that is genocidal,<sup>59</sup> but the Nazi as America's arch-enemy predates these works and come from a period in which depictions of the Nazi atrocities avoided mention of anti-Semitism, concentrating instead on rampant imperialism.



World War II combat films set in the European theater avoided issues of race by reminding Americans of their recent racist enemy. Likewise, they allowed America to concentrate on ideology rather than racial differences by substituting America's current enemy with a German Nazi. Jews and the Holocaust are consciously absent from 1950s World War II films set in the European theater and appear in films released during the 1960s only through subtle hints and images that are reminiscent of the growing visual vocabulary surrounding the Holocaust. The image of the crematorium, for instance, plays a significant role in the narrative of *The Dirty Dozen* (1967). The camps are depicted by 1980 in *The Big Red One*, but receive only passing reference in *Saving Private Ryan*, released in 1998, by Stephen Spielberg who was also responsible for *Schindler's List* (1993). Images of the Holocaust distract from the military valor evoked by these films even if it is the Holocaust, in abstention, that contextualizes World War II valor by showing good Americans killing evil Nazis. In the case of *Saving Private Ryan*, for instance, the film makes a point to show that Private Stanley Mellish is Jewish, that he is fighting against the anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany, but the interplay between Mellish as a Jewish soldier and his racist enemy is underrepresented by Private Mellish weeping over a Hitler Youth dagger given to him as a souvenir by a comrade in arms after landing on Omaha Beach (later he will be killed by a German soldier wielding a similar weapon). This hint of the Holocaust is delivered up for an audience who, knowledgeable in the history of genocide, fills in the information which the film leaves out, just as Mellish himself weeps over the knife fighting his own personal demons without explanation for his peers who fight the war for other reasons. The film's tagline suggests the tension implied by the film offering, "In the Last Great Invasion of the Last Great War, The

Greatest Danger for Eight Men was Saving... One.” It creates an image of WWII as a rescue mission and accentuates the greatness of the war. Obviously, a large part of why WWII was a “great” war was because it is understood as a fight between good and evil—an understanding that relies on the Nazis as genocidal, even though the film avoids direct mention of the genocide. The Holocaust is implied.

This emphasis on the Greatness of World War II has been native to American national rhetoric since the end of the war in popular media and in other venues for national conversation—it is as present, for instance, in the designation “the greatest generation” (part of their greatness rests in their having helped stop Hitler) as it is in President Barack Obama’s 2009 speech commemorating the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy invasion. In that speech, Obama asks, “Of all the battles in all the wars across the span of human history, why does this day hold such a revered place in our memory? What is it about the struggle that took place on these sands behind me that brings us back here to remember year after year after year?” (“Obama D-Day Speech”) President Obama asks, in a sense, what was it, in particular, that makes the Normandy invasion a ‘good’ battle. Later in that speech, he answers that question:

We live in a world of competing beliefs and claims about what is true. It is a world of varied religions and cultures and forms of government. In such a world, it is rare for a struggle to emerge that speaks to something universal about humanity.

The Second World War did that. No man who shed blood or lost a brother would say that war is good. But all know that this war was essential. For what we faced in Nazi totalitarianism was not just a battle of competing interests. It was a competing vision of humanity. Nazi ideology sought to subjugate, humiliate, and exterminate. It perpetrated murder on a massive scale, fueled by a hatred of those who were deemed different and therefore inferior. It was evil. (“Obama D-Day Speech”)

*Saving Private Ryan*'s message about the war is the same as that of President Obama: Omaha Beach was a good battle because it led the way to victory against the Nazis who were evil in an indisputable manner. The justification for the 'goodness' of D-Day is the rescue of the Jews, just as the goodness of the *Saving Private Ryan*'s justification of its fictional D-Day is a rescue mission. Despite the fact that no Jewish prisoners were liberated on Omaha Beach, it is the liberation of the concentration camps which remains central in our consideration of that historic battle.

If World War II movies do not (or perhaps can not) vilify the Nazi directly through a language of genocidal racism, what language do they then employ? Obviously, with hundreds of movies, television shows, magazine stories, etc., the villainy of the Nazis is likely to include a variety of disparate characteristics, but commonalities exist enough to bear analysis. For the most part, the image of the wartime German is always divided. Often, there is a military German character and a Nazi German character. In such movies where the military German is given a personality, they are a wartime adversary, like their American counterpart, but otherwise, not particularly evil.

Commandant Von Luger in *The Great Escape* presents a notable example of this military German character. He is efficient, cold, and determined, but his goal is only to run his camp efficiently—not to torture or murder. When he first introduces Richard Attenborough's character, squadron leader Roger Bartlett, to the camp, he offers, "you will not be denied the use of facilities: sports, library, recreation hall, and for gardening, we will give you tools" (*The Great Escape*). Even as he catches prisoners attempting escape, he locks them away in solitary confinement rather than putting them up against a wall with the brutality one would expect from Nazi Germany. When he learns that the

SS have shot all of his escaped prisoners, he is appalled. The camp commandant in *Stalig 17* (1953), though more odious, operates under the same principal. He makes the prisoners stand out in the rain, but he is not horrible or horrifying in the way that, later, Amon Goeth will be for *Schindler's List*.

Even the choice of depicting camp life through the rubric of *The Great Escape* or *Stalig 17* is determinative. Though both films try for a realistic depiction of a POW camp, in choosing to depict German villainy in this way, the filmmakers turn to these examples because they evoke the camps without actually reducing the pathos of American virtue through comparison to victims of the Holocaust. In *The Great Escape*, when workers from a nearby camp in Upper Silesia file out with Charles Bronson disguised among them, the audience is supposed to think Bronson diligent and clever; they are not supposed to wonder whether the other camp is Auschwitz, also located in Upper Silesia.

In most films, German military personnel are just waiting to be shot by the various allied heroes. There's no point in analyzing the character of the Germans in *The Guns of Navarone*. They show up. They get shot or they shoot. The heroes eventually kill them. If they have any lines at all, they are a combination of the words "Achtung!" (attention) or "schnell!" (quickly) always loudly barked at heroes who don't understand or at other military personnel who are unknowingly running towards their death. Most WWII films set in combat against Nazi Germany employ this two dimensional variety of German (*The Battle of the Bulge*, *The Longest Day*, etc.). What matters is that the heroes have something to shoot at which happens to also shoot back.

Opposite this wartime enemy, these films often include a single character who acts as the embodiment of evil. These characters shoot or torture the innocent, often with a grim sense of perverseness about them. For all the bullet headed targets in *The Guns of Navarone*, the real evil comes in the form of the SS officer Hauptmann Sessler who hopes to pull the plans from the heroes using the truth-serum-esque drug “Scorpamaline.” Hauptmann’s opposite comes in the form of a Nazi Commandant with whom the heroes are forced to leave their wounded in order to complete their mission. In response to their reservations, the Commandant answers, “We don’t make war on wounded men. We are not all like Hauptmann Sessler.” Thus, the movie is careful to delineate between the ideological leaders and the masses they trick into fighting.

In a later scene, Corporal Miller (played by David Niven) discovers a traitor in the midst of their compatriots. If the mission is to succeed, someone must kill the beautiful Greek woman; and this task seems to fall to Miller, because he discovered her. Miller, however, refuses to kill women, and suggests that the task belongs to the mission’s commander Captain Keith Mallory, played by Gregory Peck—whom Miller feels isn’t doing enough of his own dirty work. “Who really is guilty? The man who gives the orders or the one who does them?” (*The Guns of Navarone*) Miller thus phrases the moral dilemma to spotlight the Nuremberg Trials and the legal and moral rejection of the Nazi excuse, “I was only following orders.” He evokes the atrocities but phrases it in terms of military valor. Miller supports the Allied position that following orders confers as much guilt as giving orders. In this sense, he’s ethically better than the German soldiery who ought to recognize the problem with pursuing a war that is supported by the various Sesslers of Germany’s Nazi political commanders. However, even in this sense, it is not

clear that the various SS or Gestapo monsters in these movies clearly serve to make the entirety of Germany's war efforts demonic. The villains were sadistic, but this hardly makes Nazi Germany a paragon of evil. The Japanese were, for instance, depicted as being just as sadistic.

Of course, films were made in great abundance about America's fight against the Japanese, but as time wore on, the Pacific theater of the war became decreasingly popular with film makers. In the 50s, most World War II movies depicted naval battles against the Japanese fleet, during the 60s, the balance shifted, and since that time, the fight against Nazi Germany has become an increasingly popular subject for film makers. The fight against Japan has become decreasingly popular in proportion to the increasing benevolence between the United States and postwar Japan.

It's simply not feasible to suggest that the fight against Nazi Germany was popularized because it held some intrinsic value as an American victory alone (other victories existed against the other Axis powers). According to Jeanine Basinger, "Since World War II is one of the biggest events of American history, it is natural that films about it would continue to be of interest. However, the same might be said about the Civil War, World War I, and even the Spanish American War" (81). This is simply not a criterion for the preeminence of World War II as a wartime film setting. It is also not a feasible criterion for that preeminence that the war against the Nazis would become an oft-employed scenario because of its capacity to avoid the censure of the American military. Again the war as prosecuted against imperial Japan would have made it past military censors, as would the Spanish-American war, the Mexican-American war, and

WWI all of which would have had as much bearing, if not more, on establishing Korea as the enemy and stirring up anti-communist sentiments.

One of the things that World War II films provided was catharsis for an audience that had passed judgment on Nazi Germany for the images it had seen in the camp liberation films. This could not be provided by movies about war with Imperial Japan. In terms of the Russians, the films showed Americans how to handle their postwar enemy in a virtuous and righteous manner and allowed Americans to delineate too the Russian leadership from the Russian populace in terms of guilt (and through the understanding that even the duped Russian people, like the German military, were dangerous). As the popularity of films set in Europe waxed, and films set in Asia waned, it was these depictions which were became increasingly useful to Americans in understanding their enemies. Its vision of dystopia depended upon an understanding of a totalitarian mindset and not a world quartered off by the essential divisions of race. Depictions of Nazi Germany provided Americans with a necessary description of evil after fascism had all but robbed them of a viable essentialist definition of good.

As utopian visions, however, commercial World War II combat films had very little to offer. They suggested, ultimately, that America had already peaked as a utopian ideal some time between 1942 and 1945. This was especially true of films set in the Pacific which could only show Americans fighting bravely for the war effort and could not provide a definition of evil that would last beyond the war. The failure of anti-Communist sentiments when used as a basis for film suggests that no path to a utopian vision was possible through the paranoia of the Second Red Scare either. The lessons of goodness derived from fighting Japan could not be transferred, postwar, to the totalitarian

enemy of Communist Russia, and the lessons learned from fighting Nazi Germany were all negative. Through the fight against Hitler, one could define evil—good had to be, and could only be defined as the thing that had defeated that evil.

In effect, the record of box office success and failures suggests that America, in fighting Nazi Germany could remain good in fighting enemies that were like the Nazis, but the result of a fight against the Communists, if not bolstered by the fight against the Nazis, had no utopian value whatsoever. This sentiment began as a simple preference in mass culture for a particular variety of patriotic rhetoric, but began to grow into a critique of American culture. For if America could only be heroic when fighting the Nazis, then the patriotic attitudes suggested in official anti-Communist propaganda were at best tragic, and at worst hypocritical, in their description of what America would have to sacrifice in order to fight against the Communist threat.

The “The Port Huron Statement” written in 1962, capitalized on this hypocrisy by contemplating America’s sacrifice of a utopian vision for its Cold War mindset. The authors of the statement, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), wrote:

[T]he message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present. Beneath the reassuring tones of the politicians, beneath the common opinion that America will “muddle through”, beneath the stagnation of those who have closed their minds to the future, is the pervading feeling that there simply are no alternatives, that our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well. Feeling the press of complexity upon the emptiness of life, people are fearful of the thought that at any moment things might thrust out of control. They fear change itself, since change might smash whatever invisible framework seems to hold back chaos for them now. For most Americans, all crusades are suspect, threatening. (8)

The basic indictment by the SDS is clear: Americans have no reason to believe in the possibility of a better tomorrow because they believe all crusades are suspect. Their incredulity hearkens to the suppositions made by Baudrillard about the hyperreal. One



cannot put faith in a model of reality that is based on endless succession of other models, none more or less real than the last. America, according to the SDS, has no real model with which to approach social change because their previous models, and those that hold them, have become exhausted. Essentialism has become soured through Nazism, but its opposite, context dependent evaluation, cannot exist alongside the American nationalism of the cold war. Moreover, the products of mass culture suggest in this malaise a growing fear that the new enemy of communism has caused America to become entrenched in this nationalism and, therefore, have made it prone to resemble its old enemy, Nazi Germany.

This fear was perpetuated by the characterization of the Nazi menace as a form of invasive imperialism shared with the Russians. If Russia was like the Nazis for wanting to take over the world, then the growing narrative of American imperialism was cause for suspicion. As the Nazis wanted to incinerate civilian populations, so too would those who launched nuclear weapons at each other—whether they were Russian or American. Nazi metaphors were useful in demonizing Russia precisely because American propaganda, official and unofficial, had never interrogated the evil that had driven the Germans to commit the atrocities at places like Buchenwald.

Because the American media had universalized the victims, it encouraged the understanding that the Nazis were dangerous because of their desire to take over the world, but these encouraged anti-American rhetoric to utilize the Nazis in metaphor as well. Because Russia didn't have to kill 6 million Jews to be like the Nazis, neither did the United States. For the "no nukes" movement, for instance, many of their preferred metaphors were drawn from the America's war with Nazi Germany such as the V-2

rocket, Werner von Braun and the crematorium which would equate the Nazi atrocities of history to the nuclear holocaust of the terrifying and possible future—a new kind of fire which would punish all people no matter what their race. Obviously, in such a scheme, the mushroom cloud of the atom bomb, reminiscent of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are metaphors which have a direct corollary to nuclear destruction, but the use of Atomic weapons occurs after the nation's fight against the Nazis—their use as symbols for nuclear Armageddon is anachronistic and inappropriate, except for the meanings implied through genocide.

Moreover, the vague definitions of Nazism encouraged by dominant culture in order to bring Nazism and Communism together for indictment under the banner of totalitarianism also invited the criticism of the counter culture. After all, if the dominant culture needed Nazism to indict their communist enemies, if in short, communism could not be indicted on its own faults, then the charges against communism were suspect for not being able to stand on their own, as was the justification of the American military industrial complex which had been empowered by those charges.

The language of that criticism is interesting though in that it too took on the metaphor of Nazism in order to show the dominant culture's rhetoric as problematic. The reason for this is rather simple. Nazism had been employed with such regularity that the pattern had become rote within the culture. Evil was compared to Nazism, to be noble or virtuous was to be in opposition to Nazism. Thus, the anti-war movement took on the model by putting themselves in the place of the noble opponents of Nazism, and by painting their enemy, the war-sponsoring excesses of the dominant culture, as Nazis. Thus, rhetoric that employed Nazism to define evil could be criticized, but because no

other metaphor for evil was as immediately available and recognizable nationally, for criticism to have success in mass culture, it too would have to employ Nazism through analogy.

Perhaps the most famous example of this rhetoric was the 1964 dark comedy, *Dr. Strangelove*, in which director Stanley Kubrick gave the American public his strangely successful depiction of the Nazi as a figure of nuclear Armageddon. Strangelove himself, played by Peter Sellers, represented a new kind of Nazi who has joined forces with the U.S. in their attempts to keep up an arms race with the Soviets but who has not, and has not had to, give up his old loyalties to Nazism. He repeatedly catches and corrects himself as he makes reference to President Merkin Muffley, also played by Sellers, as his Fuehrer, and he accents his speeches with Nazi salutes.

Strangelove is disturbing. He is alien to the film's other characters. Physically, he is an exaggerated caricature: wheelchair bound and adorned with impenetrably dark glasses as if his science had already rendered him cybernetic. He is, at once, embroiled in the conflicts of the film's "war room" and also above the paltriness of the dilemma. He does not, for instance, join in on the others' prayer of thanks for deliverance "from the wings of the angel of death" (*Dr. Strangelove*). When it is clear that the B-52 has dropped its cargo of hydrogen bombs, he is not upset, but excited. He jubilantly outlines his plan to save the human race, or at least members who will be saved from the fires by their fulfillment of certain criteria.

Strangelove meets the disaster of America's accidental first strike and the involuntary nature of the Soviets' counter-attack always with a strained smile. His body seems under two minds so that during one of his attempts to talk he must quell a rebellious hand that

tries to strangle him. His German accent and the accidental inclusion of Nazisms in his speech betray his affiliation to the Third Reich. His position as director of the President's weapon program, reveal the importance of his role for the postwar world and also hint at his prominence within the Nazi regime.

The character of Dr. Strangelove is most likely a parody of Werner von Braun, the designer of the V-2 rocket who was, post-war, relocated to America to help pioneer the space program and through it, America's rocket technology. Like von Braun, Dr. Strangelove is also an ex-Nazi scientist whose past affiliations (and their continued presence) are suspect. General 'Buck' Turgidson offers his racist cautionary against forgetting Strangelove's past in the film when he says, "A kraut by any other name" (*Dr. Strangelove*).

Von Braun, like Strangelove, could not simply put aside his Nazi past either. "In the years after the war, when von Braun and other Peenemünde veterans had risen to responsible positions in the American space program, accusations regarding their role in the Mittelwerk slave labor production rose occasionally" (Dunar and Waring 9). Von Braun was asked to explain his role in the SS, a promotion which Dunar and Waring claim von Braun "accepted only after he and his colleagues agreed that to turn it down might risk Himmler's wrath" (10). The issue was also raised as to how much von Braun knew concerning the atrocities committed at the concentration camp Dora where "20,000 died as a result of execution, starvation, and disease" while helping to build the V-2 rocket (Dunar and Waring 7). How could von Braun not have known that the rocket factory under his control was manned by prisoners forced into slave labor?

The amnesty offered von Braun and the other scientists brought over as part of Project Paperclip gave them a limited reprieve from suspicion. Aside from the occasional surfacing of his controversial background, von Braun became a limited scientific and political celebrity. He worked for Disney as a technical advisor and narrated Disney's 1955 short film, *Man in Space*. As the U.S. required top rocket scientists to build their nuclear arsenal, it had to look to Nazi Germany where rocket pioneering had been at the forefront of war research.

By officiating the claim that these men were simply scientists with no responsibility for the crimes committed in the nearby camps, the U.S. government whitewashed Nazi affiliation and even membership in the SS. Clearly, the film *Dr. Strangelove* offered another way to interpret the background of the Project Paperclip scientists which ran counter to the official established narrative. By obviating the Nazi elements, *Strangelove* did not directly indict, but it did aggravate worries about the relative guilt of men like von Braun for the Nazi atrocities. Dr. Strangelove's Nazi background, his alien attitude towards human fear, and his position as the President's expert on nuclear weaponry pay tribute to the suspicion that our weapons program was founded upon Nazi philosophy, politics, and worst of all, ethics.

*Dr. Strangelove* is a dystopian vision of a world which becomes its worst nightmare so as to fight its enemies. In the film, America has learned nothing from its encounter with the Nazis—it is as driven by its own rampant nationalism as were the followers of Adolph Hitler. Through its parody of Von Braun, *Dr. Strangelove* suggests that nuclear war itself is the byproduct of Nazi Germany. In taking up its arms race, America becomes a nation comparable to Nazi Germany in its response to the Soviets. When

General Turgidson recommends that the president order a first strike on the Russians, President Merkin Muffley retorts, “I will not go down in History as the greatest mass murderer since Adolf Hitler,” because he understands the implication of starting nuclear war: that the ensuing death he would cause would be comparable ethically to the Holocaust (*Dr. Strangelove*).

The use of Nazi metaphors to depict America’s nuclear proliferation is exemplified in the film by the explanations offered by Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper for his ordering ‘Wing Attack Plan R’ (the order that sends bombers into Russia). Ripper offers, “I can no longer sit back and allow communist infiltration, communist indoctrination, communist subversion, and the international communist conspiracy to sap and impurify our precious bodily fluids” (*Dr. Strangelove*). Ripper is obsessed with eugenics and like many Americans in the 1950s, afraid of the implications of national fluoridation. His belief is that fluoridation is a “postwar commie conspiracy”: an attempt to biologically corrupt the purity of the American people and his reaction equates anti-Communism with Nazism through nuclear holocaust (*Dr. Strangelove*).

When it becomes clear that Ripper’s attempt to purify the American race has failed, Ripper shoots himself in his bunker in a manner reminiscent of the suicide of Adolf Hitler. In his article on *Dr. Strangelove*, Charles Maland offers a reading of the scene: “By portraying this paranoid officer willing to obliterate the world because of fluoridation, Kubrick lays bare the irrational American fear of Communism as once source of the cultural malaise of the early 1960s” (706). Maland, like many of the movie’s critics, fails to notice the obvious links between a fear of communism and a fear

of Nazism, the purifying of the natural bodily fluids of America against the communist threat and purifying the Aryan race against the biological basis for the “Jewish problem.”

Through the character of Dr. Strangelove, Kubrick complicates his critique of postwar culture beyond a simple didacticism against anti-Communist attitudes. The prominent inclusion of Nazis through the character of Strangelove and the general willingness of the Americans to cooperate with their Russian counterparts suggest that *Dr. Strangelove* is attempting to divert fears away from the danger of the Communists and onto the Nazi-like behaviors of those whom America considers its allies. Before the final scene of destruction can be played out over the song, “We’ll Meet Again,” Dr. Strangelove suggests his master plan with a barely concealed exuberance. Strangelove advises the President, “I would not pass up the chance to preserve human specimens” (*Dr. Strangelove*). If the new Holocaust offered in this film is to have survivors, it will be necessary to decide who will live and who will die.

Strangelove, himself, is happy to make this decision with a computer that will choose the survivors using various criteria such as “youth, hair color, sexual fertility, intelligence, and a cross section of necessary skills” (*Dr. Strangelove*). In choosing the survivors of this worldwide catastrophe, Strangelove is capable of creating his master race, and he is finally freed of his need to hide his Nazi tendencies; he actively celebrates them through bodily expression.

If Strangelove’s strange physical comedy can be seen as a man wrestling with his need to express his Nazism, then the final scenes of the film must be read as the Nazi eugenicist finally winning control and refusing, thereafter, to be suppressed. At the end of the film, having become a Nazi, Strangelove is cured of his crippling injury. He offers

as praise for the miraculous recovery, “Mein Fuehrer, I can walk!” but it is unclear whether he is now thanking Hitler or Muffley (*Dr. Strangelove*).

If films like *The Great Escape* and *The Guns of Navarone* make a differentiation between “good” Germans and “bad” Nazis so as to help a cold war audience to exonerate its new alliance with postwar Germany, and to help understand the nature of the totalitarian enemy, then *Dr. Strangelove*, released during this same era, complicates this view. *Strangelove* is good because he is on our side. *Strangelove* is bad because his views are based on Nazi eugenics and therefore support genocide. *Strangelove* is good because he helps America build missiles that protect the nation. *Strangelove* is bad because having nuclear weapons around, despite ideologies, causes nuclear war, which is akin to the Holocaust. Taken as a whole, *Dr. Strangelove* makes it not only impossible to tell “good” Germans from “bad” Nazis, but also to tell Nazis from anti-Communist patriots.

America is depicted in this film as the next Nazi power by virtue of its involvement with nuclear weapons, a technological breakthrough engineered by Nazi scientists. However, the Nazi corruption of America is not ideological. It is clear that General Ripper has gone insane, and has not suddenly seen the wisdom of Nazi eugenics. It is the audience that is meant to see his madness as akin to Nazi philosophy; he would make no such claim. The resolution of the movie, the nuclear annihilation that occurs despite cooperation between Soviet and American powers, suggests that the existence of nuclear weapons alone is the only necessary component for disaster.

The rocket technology of the ICBM is introduced by ex-Nazis whose participation in the Holocaust is questionable and whose escape from retribution controversial. It is as if



utilizing Nazi technology automatically creates the drive to complete the Nazi plans of extermination. Once these plans are in motion, a master race can be chosen to survive underground, reemerging a century later to complete Hitler's vision of a world free of inferior races.

*Dr. Strangelove's* hints at Nazi ideology run parallel to its concerns with nuclear weaponry. Nazis and nuclear weapons are dangerous. Their existence cannot be tolerated, and their exoneration cannot be justified. This view seems to suggest a reluctance to investigate the past even at the risk of xenophobia. By parodying von Braun in this way, *Strangelove* seems to be asking what it means to be guilty or innocent in those circumstances, and comes up with no easy answers. The fruits of Nazism have made the ideology contagious and universally evil. Motivations in *Strangelove* have nothing to do with evil precisely because Nazism has created its own morality through extreme example: one need not try to be like a Nazi in order to be like a Nazi. Accidental resemblance to Nazism is enough to warrant castigation.

This message of the movie, however, complicates simple xenophobia and renders it into an anti-patriotic paranoia. The film makes it clear that all things Nazi must be avoided, but at the same time, *Dr. Strangelove* equates the Nazi with the American, and the Holocaust with Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D.). Its use of a scenario that is particularly American to explain the problems with a scenario which other films have declared uniquely German allows the audience to investigate the Holocaust as something that they themselves might be a party to if they are not cautionary.

*Dr. Strangelove*, however, offers no means by which to recognize this caution, as would the early political intellectuals in their description of Totalitarianism and

Authoritarianism. The film ascribes mass murder to terms of circumstantial action and an ideological corruption of the very nature of cause. Nobody in *Strangelove's* war room fits the profile of the authoritarian mindset and yet, they still commit a holocaust. What should one do to avoid the tragedy of *Dr. Strangelove* except prohibit the German scientists from making their weapons? Once nuclear weapons have been created, the cause of *Dr. Strangelove* is nearly inevitable. It awaits only one factor: Ripper's conversion to a genocidal philosophy in the name of biological purity. After the American paranoid vision is embraced, the end result of *Dr. Strangelove* is achieved circumstantially.

The anti-nuclear war novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) by Thomas Pynchon presents a similar stance to that taken by *Dr. Strangelove* regarding the effacement of cause through the imposition of Nazism. Through the fractured narrative of the novel's hero, Tyrone Slothrop, Pynchon links up nuclear annihilation with the postwar cultural detritus that results from the acclamation of Nazi rocket technology by the United States and the creation of what Pynchon calls the Rockatenstadt—a strange golden age city reminiscent of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* that stands in for the dreams of the postwar future shared by, or fed to, the American public through Cold War utopian visions.

The narrative is suffused with scenes that suggest the cinematic appearance of reality (Slothrop looks exactly like Bing Crosby, scenes are interrupted by dance numbers and singing, flashbacks and asides are described as film montages, etc.) as a way of producing a history that is not based in facts but in film trivia and states of cultural titillation indistinguishable from pornography (wherever, for instance, Slothrop achieves an erection, becomes the target of a V-2 rocket). Pynchon seems to ask 'what do

Americans know about history except what they learn from film?’ As a result, how could America’s history be anything but schizophrenic when its films include musicals like *White Christmas*, all those *Road To...* movies with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, as well as countless war and spy movies, and films devoted to the excesses of Nazi brutality.

For Pynchon, cause is not diffused across a coincidental string of events, but in a string of details, none more real than a matinee or suggestive of anything more than a distraction, but which, collectively, produce the postwar death-urge of nuclear annihilation through the egotism created by believing one’s experience as a viewer of an event to be the same as one’s experience as a participant in the event. The desire to be destroyed by thermonuclear weaponry is necessary precisely because it is the logical repercussion of a war that film has turned into a joke. It is from this collage of irrelevance that the nuclear annihilation is conceived and carried out as simply the next thrilling chapter in human barbarism.

At the novel’s end, the reader is introduced to an audience full of people who have been watching the midnight movie version of *Gravity’s Rainbow*<sup>60</sup>—they, like the reader, have been witness to the madness that ensues from chasing after the rocket and the attempt to attain the Nazi weapon. The race to build a postwar arsenal has become a simulation of itself that is sometimes disturbing, but just as often funny and musical. The audience that watches the novel-turned-movie can’t help but be excited by how the arsenal will be created and how its architects will be recruited. They do not react to the simulation of their destruction as destruction, but as a fantasy, despite the very real threat of nuclear annihilation under which they live. The audience of Zhubb’s theater sees the opportunism of the allies postwar as source material for hilarity—the novel’s readers are

apt to see their naïve enthusiasm as horrifying precisely because it is the audience's lack of horror that encourages the disaster. They become a strange mix suggesting Baudrillard's confusion of origin implied by the hyperreal: the audience responds to the disaster, but it is their inappropriate response that acts as the disaster's cause. They are a fictional creation, but they create for the novel's readers a description of real cause for the rise of the military industrial complex that is rooted in the culpability of American culture for its own demise. What's more, the reader of the novel reacts to all three worlds at the same time reacting enthusiastically to the narrative (like the audience), reacting with horror for the audience (and thus residing outside their ranks), and acting with fascination and alarm at the correlation between the novel's tone and the very real annihilation it attempts to describe. Perhaps the most discomforting feature of *Gravity's Rainbow* is that as Pynchon describes the likely reason for nuclear annihilation, the first reaction he invites is laughter. As suggested by Baudrillard, the reader's reaction to the simulation is to lose a sense of scandal, in this case, the capacity for dread or outrage.

Pynchon's characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are just as unlikely to act appropriately as the novel's readers—precisely because they do not seem to know that they are in a movie and that the differentiations between the various depths of their worlds (spiritual or fictional versus real, for instance) are an illusion. Carroll Eventyr, for instance, is a medium who contacts other dead psychics who in turn contact the spirit of the V-2 rocket which resides in an afterlife ruled by its creator: Dominus Blicero, but of course, it's an illusion (Pynchon 30). The different spiritual existences are all the same in that they are all part of Pynchon's fiction—just as the fiction of the novel is an artifact of the real and thus, the novel's fiction is real. The novel ends with a popping out of the fictional

universe into a real theater, but it's no more real to the reader than the postwar zones of Pynchon's Europe, but then how much more real is a real phenomena from an unreal description that happens to be accurate—Gravity's Rainbow may be ludicrous, but if it describes the postwar death urge accurately, then its lack of realism is irrelevant.

Pynchon seems to be asking what reality has to do with the danger of being killed by a nuclear bomb—if you're in ground zero, no matter how much sense it makes or not, you're dead.

By the novel's finale, when the fictional audience of Zhubb's theater enters into the narrative, Slothrop has already disappeared for some two hundred pages. It is not clear whether the character has gone mad, become the novel's omniscient narrator, or has disappeared because he is no longer needed by the narrator to account for the narrative's continuance (he, himself, has become yet another insignificant detail of his story).

Slothrop becomes the myth of Slothrop for much of the last third of the novel and in doing so, mirrors the myth of the Second World War (that it was a good war, that it was a war to stop evil, that those who opposed evil were made naturally good, etc.). Slothrop, who was never very real even when he was the main character of the novel, goes on to become a rallying cry for patriotism against an invisible 'They.' The other characters of the novel, known collectively as "The Counterforce," search for the rocket in the name of Slothrop, but in vain. By the novel's end, the evil Nazi super-scientist Blicero launches the rocket as the various icons of American heroism (the Lone Ranger, Plasticman, etc.) arrive "alas, too late." The valor which they inherit from Slothrop is made problematic by the idea that there never had been a Slothrop, that he was a myth, but if so, so too is their valor a myth, and so also is the rest of the novel as it is perhaps just a film.

At its conclusion, the audience for that film (and for the novel) sits waiting for the final moments after Blicero (another von Braun stand-in or at the very least, one of von Braun's Peenmünde crowd) launches the infamous 00000 rocket and Blicero's love slave, Gottfried, into the sky to follow the arc of gravity's rainbow, Gottfried, who is enveloped in a shroud of sexually responsive plastic called Imipolex-G, will guide the rocket through the strength of his passion/death urge to a moment twenty five years after the end of the war, to Southern California and the Orpheus Theater owned by Richard M. Zhubb—a character generally acknowledged as Pynchon's stand-in for President Richard Nixon.

Unfortunately, the film has broken in this final scene. The reader is left among the crowded movie theater along with an audience chanting, "Come on, Start the Show! Come on, Start the show!" As the projectionist attempts to fix the movie, the break in the continuity of the film's passage is mirrored by a break in the passage of time for Gottfried and the 00000 rocket. It hangs just over the theater, waiting to fall and being urged on by an audience, whose exuberance over the a-historical World War II filmic version of *Gravity's Rainbow* is leading them to invite their own nuclear annihilation.

To put it bluntly, *Gravity's Rainbow* is an odd book. It's slippage from fantasy to reality; its cinematic portrayal; its characters who have other people's daydreams for them, who cause bombs to fall by getting erections, and who talk to rockets through Ouija boards all serve to make the novel confusing, and at times equally humorous and horrifying, but its mannerism are meant to fit the subject matter it describes. The ridiculousness of *Gravity's Rainbow* comes from a postwar attempt to encapsulate in America's war against Nazi Germany both Auschwitz and Bob Hope/Bing Crosby

musicals. It is the strange notion that one can watch World War II period movies in order to bolster patriotism and not risk feeling so morally superior that possession of the bomb does not seem dangerous. The horror of postwar culture, as critiqued by Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is that the Andrews Sisters and the Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B can be associated with the Blitzkrieg and the bombing of Britain without raising issue as to compatibility.

Slothrop's fears, his ridiculous Hawaiian shirts, the fact that he looks just like Bing Crosby mark him as the devil-may-care-GI of so many romantic comedies set in World War II, but Slothrop will move through the carved up Germany, he will see the Dora work camp, and tour the Mittlewerke bomb factory. When he meets the Russian and American forces searching everywhere for the scientist responsible for the rocket, he will see that the atrocities the Nazis have committed are immaterial to the future superpowers as they search for the rocket technology and the scientists necessary for the construction of their new weaponry. They will be the same in that both America and Russia will be nonplussed by the atrocities they are willing to overlook in order to get ahead in the arms race. Faced with this vision of the postwar world, Slothrop will go insane.

The book suggests that its reader too, given with hindsight the ability to know all that Slothrop knows, should confront the madness of war that drives patriotism and through it nuclear annihilation. They are invited to face the lies of a history created through matinee representations and television docudramas. The oddities and fractures of the narrative are attempts to undermine the value systems that link the fight against evil, to the presence of good, to the validation of nuclear annihilation. *Gravity's Rainbow* presents the Nazis that appear in American rhetoric as creatures derived from film, and

not history. At the same time, however, it is precisely the understanding of evil through the metaphor of Nazism that is responsible for destruction through nuclear war. His choice of Nazis in this role is at odds with the choice of Nazis for the role of enemy in American pro-war rhetoric. Its central position in both sides of the argument is not arbitrary.

Neither *Gravity's Rainbow* nor *Dr. Strangelove* locates the most prominent feature of the Nazi enemy as racism but a drive towards brutality that is continued by America through its attempt to incorporate Nazi rocket technology into the postwar American arsenal. Moreover, the brutality of America and its nuclear arsenal (which even now, after the Cold War has ended, and the stockpile has waned, numbers more than 9000 warheads) was not evil enough on its own, but had to be associated with the Nazis in order for its danger to be conceptualized. What need is there for characters like Dr. Strangelove and Blicero unless it is to make the audience understand that the real problem with this technology is that it was inherited by evil Nazis? The logical fallacy here is plain: had we developed rocket technology without the help of von Braun, would ICBMs be any less dangerous?

These examples have been chosen to illuminate the systematic process of an expanding thematic scope for the rhetoric. First Nazism was used as a metaphor for evil in order to demonize the Nazis themselves. Then it was used to demonize America's next wartime enemy: expanding its scope from wartime enemy to peacetime rival followed soon after by the use of Nazi analogy to justify America's domestic policy. Eventually, the rhetoric ceased to be controlled by the state and became used in critiques of the state. The circle of its usage grew ever larger from wartime enemy to all foreign



enemies to all state enemies to all political enemies including those defined outside of official state politics. This particular example, Nazism in relation to the rhetoric related to communism, has provided a description of the methodology by which the Nazi analogy broadens scope to finally prove ubiquitous—imminently appropriate for all American definitions of evil.

The analysis made through the example of anti-communism, however, has not been, and could not have been, exhaustive. The choice of examining anti-Communism in terms of its anti-Nazi rhetoric was a selection made by favoring extremes. America should have been able to demonize communist Russia based on its ability to infiltrate, its human rights violations against its own citizens, and the very real danger it posed in the nuclear stalemate. Likewise, analogies to Nazism are absolutely unnecessary in order to depict racism and war as dangerous social ills.

These are subjects where the definition of right and wrong should have been rather self-evident...and yet, they fall back on analogies to Nazism to make their point precisely because right and wrong have ceased to be self-evident. Only Nazism works to establish the definition of evil. The solidity of right and wrong positions, otherwise, denote dystopia for the post World War II world. The definition of utopia became, after the Second World War, liberal in the sense meant by Richard Rorty: virtue defined as open-mindedness and freedom from prejudice. The singular vision of the world and its values as supplied by Nazism all but demands, in its demonization postwar, that singular visions be abandoned as dystopian.

These extreme examples imply an ever-enlarging scope: a suggestion of just how far reaching the usage of Nazi analogies may be utilized, but as the analysis centers on a

single theme, it, unfortunately, risks the impression of limited scope: analyzing Nazi analogies as they were used to further the various political causes defined by America's relationship to Russia risks excluding other causes, both those equally political and those a-political. What I have tried to suggest though is a reasonable description of why and how the Nazi analogy comes into usage, what it does to the ethical argument into which it is summoned, and what it does to causes or individuals who are the subjects of the comparison. In short, it acts as a description of Nazi analogies and their effect on American ethics by looking at a specific ethical problem from which a general case can be made to extrapolate out to other ethical problems.

If, however, ubiquity throughout American ethical rhetoric is the goal of this analysis, then the argument must, by necessity, expand beyond the borders of the Cold War. It must address crypto-Nazis, and safety Nazis, soup Nazis, and femi-Nazis. It must deliver up some reason why Charles Manson carved a swastika in his forehead, why "Spring Time for Hitler" doesn't offend an American audience, and why sado-masochists dress up in SS regalia for sexual titillation. What has been described, thus far, is how to analyze analogies to Nazism, their use and their scope, in a scaled down feature of American culture—ubiquity demands that the analogies, and their implications, be discussed in the state we now find them: suffused throughout American culture, synonymous with evil, imminently appropriate to the point of being obligatory, and finally, meaningless.

## CHAPTER 6

### NAZISM, MCCARTHYISM, AND THE COUNTERCULTURE: THE PLACE OF RACE IN NAZI ANALOGIES

Injustices measured through comparisons to Nazism should remain injustices regardless of Nazism. Russia's ability to fire nuclear missiles at America during the Cold War was a dire threat regardless of the resemblance it shared with Nazi Germany. Political evil was, however, described consistently during this era using this particular analogy though it was neither necessary nor consistently appropriate. The ubiquity of this comparison, its frequent usage as well as the obligatory nature of that usage, suggests that Nazism served, not only as an example of the evil enemy for Cold War culture, but as *the* example: a reliable description of villainy when all other descriptions were becoming more and more subject to dismissal through contextualization. In attaining this unique position, Nazism also gained the position of synonymy. Nazism served not only as America's exclusive example of evil against which all other evils appealed for comparison during the Cold War, but also, in being unique, Nazism became definitive of that evil.

What should also be clear from the preceding chapters of analysis is that the actual definition of Nazism evoked in analogy has been fluid and subject to change over the years leading up to, during, and following the Second World War. Nazism might imply a tendency towards authoritarianism, anti-Semitism, fascism, communism, or imperialism. It could be evoked to stir American patriotism towards the cause of military aggression, or it could be used to critique military aggression. But even in the arenas of usages I have offered, thus far—critiques of America's postwar self-image in literature and film,

in Cold War propaganda, World War II films, and the rhetoric of the anti-war movement, I have only shown a small fraction of the ways in which American rhetoric had brought the Nazi analogy to bear for whatever cause it attempted to endorse or decry. By the time *Dr. Strangelove* and *Gravity's Rainbow* were released in the late 1960s and early 70s, the Nazi analogy had made its way into a multitude of other political movements as well. My hope has been that by showing how Nazism operated through mainstream culture in mass cultural movements, the mechanisms might be made plain and their operation extrapolated to include movements with less mass cultural appeal.

The most salient feature of this mechanism is that, because Nazism could be made to stand-in for a general definition of evil through example, the specific ideology of Nazism was less important to its function than the images associated with it through camp liberation. What was of utmost importance when calling someone a Nazi or referring to a cause as rooted in Nazism was that the camps had made such a designation pejorative. Race and racism as charges were far less important, and in many cases, needn't be evoked at all, when making the analogy. *Dr. Strangelove*, for instance, accentuates the evil of nuclear proliferation through Nazi analogy without mention of Jews or anti-Semitism. Likewise, the evil of communism is made plain through an analogy to Nazism in Cold War propaganda films implying that both ideologies are totalitarian, not that they are both homicidally racist.

What must also be added to the description of this cultural mechanism is that the inclusion of racism in analogies involving Nazism was complicated and not always self evident. Whatever the mass media said about the Nazis, it was clear that another narrative, equally compelling though less directly vocalized, suggested that the evil of the

Nazis had been the result of their essential belief in the superiority of the Aryan race and the prejudices against all other races inherent to that belief. This included, especially, the anti-Semitism that went part and parcel with Americans' understanding, if not their representation, of Nazism. Americans knew that the Nazis were racists, but they demonized them in the mass media as brutally bent on world conquest. Nonetheless, racism continued to undergird America's postwar understanding of Nazism even when it went unspoken. It was impossible to ignore, but it was also difficult to recognize as central particularly because America was a segregated society with a Southern region that still operated on a caste system designated by race and legalized by Jim Crow laws. For Americans, to say that the Nazis were evil *because* of their racism would have been to implicate America's attitudes as well. To remove racism from the description of Nazism's evil would, however, have been to exclude what was popularly, if silently, understood by the American populace at large.

The results of this conundrum were two-fold. First, as already discussed in previous chapters, racism was attached to other features of Nazism which could be openly discussed in the mass media without fear of hypocrisy: the Nazis became totalitarian, authoritarian, etc. The terms, though they did not ordinarily imply racism, began to take on racist connotations because of their association with Nazism. Thus, though the Russians needn't be racist to be totalitarian (and, therefore, like the Nazis) because they *were* like the Nazis, the implication was that they were racist as well. In *Dr. Strangelove*, for instance, though racism has nothing to do, normally, with the dangers of nuclear proliferation, because it is depicted as Nazi-like in the film, the narrative of race (racial hygiene, superiority, and cleansing) becomes inescapable.

Second, because one of the preeminent meanings of Nazism as a cultural symbol is its capacity to reflect America's self-image as anti-Nazi, objection to Nazism began to take on the connotation of patriotism and to imply an American definition of virtue. This meaning made more sense, of course, when it was America's enemies which were being compared to Nazis: when Russia was made to seem like Nazi Germany, objection to communism was made as patriotic as a fight against Nazism. It made less sense, however, once the loose definition of Nazism allowed the analogy to be made in political arguments unrelated to American nationalism, or when rooted in nationalism but implying an analogy between Nazi Germany and America itself. When, for instance, America's self image of superiority for having defeated the Nazis is criticized by making America appear Nazi-like, as in *The Third Man* or O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, the implication is that it is more patriotic *not* to believe in the superiority of America than it is to uphold an idea of national virtue. Anti-Americanism, when voiced as anti-Nazism, paradoxically, becomes patriotic.

At the same time, critiques of social custom or attitudes that utilized the Nazi analogy naturally implied the mantle of patriotism in much the same way as analogy to the Nazis implied racism. When William Baldwin wrote, in a letter sent to Angela Davis while she was in jail, "You look exceedingly alone—as alone, say, as the Jewish housewife in the boxcar headed for Dachau, or as any one of our ancestors, chained together in the name of Jesus, headed for a Christian land," (13) the obvious implication is that the incarceration of Davis is comparable to what the Nazis did to the Jews, and just as comparable is what the American system of chattel slavery did to Africans. Moreover, it implies that the fight against the prison system and the system of racial repression is a

fight against Nazism and is therefore patriotic: Davis is, in Baldwin's letter, cast in the role of the housewife which she would otherwise be were it not for the fascist system of American racism. The last point is illustrated further later in that same letter when Baldwin writes:

Only a handful of the millions of people in this vast place are aware that the fate intended for you, Sister Angela, and or George Jackson, and for the numberless prisoners in our concentration camps—for that is what they are—is a fate which about to engulf them, too. (Davis 16)

His sentiments imply a mass struggle against rampant nationalism, though in this case, the rampant nationalism that has imprisoned millions of people is America's dominant culture of racism. Moreover, the millions of people in jail, like Angela Davis and George Jackson, are not criminals, but victims of nationalism—a point which is mirrored quite often in the writings of prison reform activists from the late 60s and early 70s.

In 1970, to give but one more example among many, in a letter openly addressed to his brothers and sisters, Fleeta Drumgo writes:

It seems at times that the oppression and violence inflicted upon us here in the maximum security is more intense than that inflicted upon us in the minimum security , but really it's utterly impossible for me or any of us here to distinguish the oppression and violence we are all victimized by. I am constantly thinking about unemployment, under-employment, poverty and malnutrition that are the basic facts of our existence; it's this which sends persons to these concentration camps; it's this which causes so-called crime in general. (Davis 115)

Drumgo, one of the 'Soledad Brothers' accused of killing a prison guard in 1970 and acquitted in 1972, confuses, in this letter, meaning in a manner reminiscent of Borges's *Tlön* or Orwell's *Newspeak* by unjustifiably making imprisonment a state synonymous with otherwise unrelated conditions. All prisons, according to Drumgo, are the same and the world outside the prison is also a prison. Moreover, all of these prisons are concentration camps, in which people are put, not because they are criminals but because

they are victims. My goal here is not to meet these attempts at synonymy with cynicism—they are the natural repercussions of Drumgo’s analogy: as soon as the prisons become concentration camps, the guards must become Nazis, and the criminals must become innocent victims of a fascist government.

Furthermore, because the Nazi analogy has been evoked, the entire criminal justice system must become racist and the fight against it must become patriotic (despite the fact that it is a fight against the American legal system). Drumgo continues in the letter offering:

The decadence and corruption in the present day society and in these concentration camps must be dealt with by the people, and the only way we can deal with it is uniting, becoming as one! Because people who are oppressed, exploited and deprived are one. What I am trying to relay is the fact that we are all prisoners, and under the yoke of fascist enslavement. Anyone who can deny this fact isn’t really concerned about liberation; he considers himself free and the attitude relates directly to the petty-bourgeois class of society. (Davis 116)

The final point in this statement is interesting because it begins to assume the mantle of patriotic rhetoric as implied by the analogy to Nazism. If the American legal system is Nazi-like, then a fight against it must necessarily mean patriotism, but as that patriotism is directed against America, it necessarily blurs the line between the anti-fascist and the anti-American. As a result, Drumgo necessarily takes on the mantle of the enemy of America and begins to talk like a communist.

But what Drumgo, interestingly enough, doesn’t invoke is the rhetoric of racism itself. The omission is glaring, precisely because one expects some mention of race, and precisely because the solidarity evoked by Drumgo requires that he leave race out (“Because people who are oppressed, exploited and deprived are one”). It is not enough to simply suggest that by making this a description of fascist oppression and the need for



socialist revolution, Drumgo has allowed himself the vehicle of Nazism as a metaphor because it is, otherwise, quite natural that Drumgo mention Nazis even had he concentrated only on the oppressiveness of racism.

What Drumgo's rhetoric, and the rhetoric of other writer's like him, suggests is that Nazism, when employed in analogies, can't mean just racism. It must mean these other things as well precisely because the term 'Nazi' has been made to point to so many other attitudes besides racism that its usage links it, as a symbol, to all the other instances of evil to which Nazism has been compared in order to validate their condemnation. What's more, Nazism itself has a strange history involving its use as a tool for racial oppression such that it cannot simply be used as a condemnation of racism without implying that history of connotations as well.

What Nazism means in terms of racism, even when used in such an extreme case as with Fleeta Drumgo, then, is informed by what it has meant for race relations starting particularly just after the war when its usage allowed oppression of minority groups domestically without acknowledging racist attitudes which the confrontation with Nazism had rendered taboo. In particular, the usage of Nazism in mass culture in lieu of a narrative of racism began with the anti-communist movement as it was prosecuted domestically to oppress American Jews, homosexuals, and civil rights activists.

The analogies used to describe America's enemies at home in the mass media of the Cold War era naturally mirrored comparisons used in America's anti-Communist foreign policy. The subject of the comparison was shown to have some characteristic in common with the Nazis which, generalized, tended to produce synonymy with Nazism for the purposes of their depiction. For example, in researching *The Authoritarian Personality*

(1950), the authors of the work (Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunkschwick, David Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford) conducted surveys to determine the potential for an outbreak of fascism in America<sup>61</sup>. The idea of fascism as an “outbreak” fits with the work’s overall theme that an authoritarian personality is a syndrome, a social disease. Thus, the authors’ concentration on anti-Semitism defined racism as a symptom of fascism by suggesting that the tendency towards anti-democratic ideology was synonymous with anti-Semitism. According to Daniel J. Levinson:

[T]hese considerations, which suggest the advantage of making anti-Semitism a point of departure for research, were also some of the hypotheses that guided the research as a whole. The study of anti-Semitism may well be, then, the first step in a search for antidemocratic trends in ideology, in personality, and in social movements. (Adorno 57)

The researchers in this study conflated fascism with Nazism and as a result interpreted the anti-Semitic attitudes of those interviewed as warning signs for not just Nazi, but fascist tendencies in general. The scholars also defined racism through a further conflation with Nazism by describing anyone with racist attitudes as anti-Semitic, and therefore, fascist and, consequently, Nazi.

The assumptions made by *The Authoritarian Personality* were innocuous enough to pass without objection—racists *are* like Nazis in some ways and historical Nazis *were* fascists—but the comparisons, nonetheless, confusedly prescribed the issues they hoped to describe. The study, in making all racists into Nazis, described the problem with racism in terms of its inevitable link to Nazism—the cart was put before the horse. In like manner, the problem with fascism was that it, too, was like Nazism: American fascists were only dangerous if they resembled Nazis by being anti-Semitic<sup>62</sup>. Lastly, it confused the whole issue by describing the Nazi’s most prominent character flaw as their

authoritarian tendencies which it made equivalent to anti-Semitism though the two terms, autocratic personality and racism against Jews, have wholly different meanings. Thus, people who demanded unflinching authority were, according to the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, fascist, and Nazi-like.

This view of Nazism in which the Nazi's dictatorial attitude is emphasized over their racist attitudes and policies would fall in line with larger postwar definitions of Nazism such as those which described Nazi Germany as totalitarian. It would also serve as means for using Nazis and Nazism as a comparative metaphor. Anyone who demanded adherence to procedure could be considered Nazi-like and thus all bureaucratic mechanisms had a vulnerability to analogy. Later, Hannah Arendt would strip this condition of its glamour in *Eichmann In Jerusalem* by describing the authoritarian personae of the Nazi as the banality of evil and then demonstrating it through the plodding dullard character of Adolf Eichmann, the petty bureaucrat who had provided the Nazis with their "final solution." Later, Jerry Seinfeld, in the show, *Seinfeld*, would go one step further by turning the authoritarian Nazi into comical material through his infamous Soup Nazi character—considered Nazi-like precisely because of his unswerving adherence to procedure. When his customers order soup incorrectly, the soup Nazi denies them service and banishes them from his restaurant. The Soup Nazi is neither German, nor racist. It is only his authoritarian personality that recommends him for comparison to the Nazis.

In *The Authoritarian Personality*, the demonization of fascism and racism requires their association with Nazism, even though, of course, racism and fascism were, and remain, social problems deserving of serious attention all of their own. The comparison,

accepted in mass American culture, was fallacious and served to produce false vindications and confused relationships. If fascism required Nazism in order to be vilified then fascism was made to seem a subset of Nazism, marking all fascists as Nazis for the authors and those influenced by this seminal work on American Anti-Semitism. Once Nazism was considered a necessary component of dangerous racism then racist attitudes that lacked a particular resemblance to Nazism naturally came to seem more tolerable.

The study addressed a particular problem with reconciling American racism with the racism of their defeated enemies. In a limited sense, *The Authoritarian Personality*, revealed the paradox even as it established an alternative reading of the Nazis as evil (authoritarian rather than racist). Postwar America responded to the obvious similarities between its attitudes concerning race relations and those of the recently defeated Nazi Germany by emphasizing characteristics of racism that were different between America and the Nazis<sup>63</sup>. Because American racism lacked the pageantry, the politics, and ultimately, the extent of brutality associated with the Nazis,<sup>64</sup> America could see its own racist attitudes as tolerable even though racism was used as a criterion for the nation's vilification of Nazi Germany and was, therefore, part of the growing usage of Nazism as the epitome of evil. The assumed differentiation worked, but only so long as the subject of racism could be sublimated and removed from conversations about American identity within the mass culture. When, for instance, resistance to school desegregation suggested comparisons between Southern racists and Nazi Germany within the mass media by civil rights activists, the differences between the racism of Nuremberg and the racism of Jim Crow were made to seem cosmetic and ineffectual.

Until that point, however, mass media relied on the definitions of totalitarianism that had helped demonize communism abroad to subdue talk of racism at home: if the designation “totalitarian” implied anti-Semitism, then a government that was not anti-Semitic (or which would give no voice to its anti-Semitic attitudes) lacked the obviolation of their racism necessary for its designation of totalitarian. Consequently, no matter how it further defined totalitarianism, because America did not consider itself to be anti-Semitic in the same way that the Nazis were, it couldn’t conceive of its attitudes as resembling those of the Nazis. When McCarthy and his supporters began to round up Jews, to provide but one example, the excesses of the era appeared anti-Communist, which obfuscated their anti-Semitic tenor (in many cases erasing them entirely), and complicating obvious analogies to Nazism by explaining racism in terms of political ideology.

The resultant view of the Second Red Scare as a product of rampant American nationalism is prevalent throughout popularly accepted historical analysis of the era. As an explanatory narrative, it allows little analytical room for discussions of McCarthyism according to its other, less obvious, characteristics. Because of this prevalence, McCarthyism is rarely analyzed in relation to its effect on the American Jewish community even though American views of communism and anti-Communism depended heavily on their prejudices against Jews. Thus, those who rounded up Jews for questioning as suspected communists were not compared to Nazis, but the Jews they rounded up, because they were accused of being communists, were vulnerable to accusations of their being like the Nazis.

In E.L. Doctorow's novel, *The Book of Daniel* (1971), for instance, the main character Daniel—a liberally fictional caricature of one of the Rosenberg's sons—reflects upon the life of his parents, including their trial, execution, and the ensuing backlash on American society. Though Daniel's parents are part of a thriving Jewish community, and though he recognizes everyone targeted as communists as also belonging to that community, the presence of anti-Semitism as recognized by Daniel is almost non-existent in the novel. The Isaacsons (the novel's name for the Rosenbergs) are victims of anti-Communist hysteria. They are punished for their sympathies with worker's movements and are presented by Doctorow as communists through and through—especially Daniel's father, Paul. Neither Daniel nor Doctorow seems to really know what to do with the story as a Jewish narrative, even though the communists in the novel all happen to be Jewish. Even scholarship that sees the novel as working towards a kind of religious model, turning Daniel into a confessor, has trouble evoking Daniel within a Jewish, or even religious context. Robert Dotweiler, in his analysis of the religious aspects of Doctorow's novel, claims, for instance, that Daniel's, "confession in this secularized environment has little to do overtly with religion" (70). Dotweiler's argument places Daniel's narrative as a continuation of the biblical Daniel, an interpreter of dreams—but in this case, the power to divine mysteries is not a function of religious insight, but the character's position within a unique political and cultural climate—first, the son of America's enemies killed for their communism, and second, a member of the hippy counter-culture personally set against the government that betrayed his family. The Isaacson's as Jews is only a further mode of indicting them—the Jewish community of the novel sees communism as atheistic and Jewish-American communists as traitors to

both their religion and their country. Daniel's only support comes from the community of people who share his parents' subversive leanings.

While *The Book of Daniel* criticizes the anti-Communist forces of America as fascist, it does so in terms of dialectical opposition to communism; they are indicted as fascists because they oppose the Communist's attempts to help workers. The depiction of fascism takes no account of the Isaacson's Jewish ethnicity except in a scant few scenes in the novel. The protesters who attack Paul Isaacson during the Paul Robeson concert incident in 1949 yell, "this will teach you, you commie bastard kikes!" (49). The comment is indicative of the role Jewish ethnicity plays in anti-Communist fervor: they are persecuted for being communists, but assumed to be Jews, and since everyone on Daniel Isaacson's bus is Jewish, the angry mob that attacks resembles anti-Semitic fascists. There is no indictment of their violence for its resemblance to Nazism by Rochelle and Paul Isaacson, though, despite their deep criticism of the anti-Communist establishment. Daniel himself makes mention of the connection between Nazism and anti-Communism only briefly:

when it [the surveillance of the anti-Communist state] reaches us, like the prison searchlight in the Nazi concentration camp, it will stop...And our blood will hurt as if it had glass in it. And it will be hot in that beam and our house will smell and smoke and turn brown at the edges and flare up in a great, sucking floop of flame. And that is exactly what happens. (108)

Though Daniel Isaacson describes his parents' arrest and execution as a second Holocaust in this passage and links it to an offense against his blood, the novel (true to its subject matter) shies away from making an indictment of America and its execution of the Rosenbergs on the grounds of anti-Semitism. Daniel is much more likely, for instance, to indict America's totalized view on acceptable behavior. Echoing the sentiments of the

Port Huron statement, he accuses America of equating Holden Caulfield with Che Guevara because both are equally living outside the America's limited view of acceptable behavior.

What accusations the novel makes about the American establishment as state funded racism come from an Abbie Hoffman-inspired character named Artie Sternlicht, not Daniel (nor even his more radical sibling, Susan). Artie doesn't care about the resemblance between America and Nazi Germany in its treatment of the Isaacsons. The appalling condition of America's ghettos is reason enough for his outcry.

Because of *The Book of Daniel's* concentration on communism and radicalism, it avoids the subject of America's oppression of Jews during the Second Red Scare. Though, clearly, Doctorow recognizes that America's prejudices against Communism are often motivated by assumptions it makes about Jewish politics, and though Doctorow himself depicts the communist community as entirely composed of Jews, the rhetoric of anti-Semitism is lost in what Douglas Fowler has called one of the novel's many blind alleys (Fowler 53).

This deliberate avoidance is fundamentally the result of Doctorow's accurately treating the actual tenor of the postwar Red Scare. Complications in depiction, like the strange way ethnic identity is always sublimated to political identity in *The Book of Daniel*, are demonstrative of America's anti-communist policy precisely because America's vision of communism in the late 40s and 50's was guided by two irreconcilable principles. The first was that communists, in being totalitarian, were like Nazis and were, therefore, anti-Semitic. The other was the very same prejudice against Jews that had, enflamed and exaggerated, validated Nazism for the Germans: the basic



belief that Jews, because of their inability or unwillingness to assimilate, were naturally drawn towards radical politics. The natural image of the communist for Americans, just as it had been for Nazi Germany (and much of the rest of the Western world), was built upon this prejudice against Jews often referred to as “The Jewish Problem”<sup>65</sup>. Because of these conflicting views, in their attempt to discover communists hiding in their midst, “Red Baiters” often singled out Jews as Communists and then accused them of having anti-Semitic tendencies so as to establish their communist sensibilities. Because of the Jewish problem, Jews were prosecuted as communists, and because of totalitarianism, Jewish Communists were prosecuted as Nazis.

Owing to this prejudice, the agencies themselves never appeared Nazi-like because their interrogations were conducted in a search for Communists and were thus part of a fight against anti-Semitic totalitarianism. In fact, the relationship between depiction and belief complicates this procedure beyond the point of culpability: if HUAC’s investigators or the FBI, naturally thought of Jews when they thought of communists because of the way American culture caricatured communists, were their motivations inherently anti-Semitic when they brought people before the committee to give testimony or did they just think of themselves as investigating communists (who just happened to be Jewish)? Were the rioters at Peekskill who shouted, “go back to Russia, nigger” and “go back to Russia, kike” racist or anti-Communist (“Paul Robeson”)? Protesters were certainly inspired by Paul Robeson’s pro-communist sentiments but what, exactly, were they protesting against? How should history remember the violence: as a dark day for America’s race relations, or as a demonstration of America’s anti-communist fervor?

This subtle confusion of race for politics sublimated the actions taken against Jews during the Red Scare to an issue of national security against Communists and buried any possibility for interpreting McCarthyism as Jewish persecution. It's perfectly conceivable that many of those who persecuted Jews never recognized themselves as persecuting anyone *as* Jews. Doctorow's Daniel (even as late as 1971) certainly never makes the connection. The sentiments of the fictional character seem indicative of the real world culture of Cold War America that the novel is attempting to critique.

Because of America's tendency to conflate Jews and Communists, however, any action taken against communists in the United States was likely to target Jews, consciously or not. When Roy Cohn, McCarthy's chief prosecutor and a Jew, learned, for instance, that the engineers of Fort Monmouth had received legal council from B'nai B'rith, he seems beside himself in the transcript of the hearing: "well, that is an outrageous assumption. I am a member and an officer of B'nai B'rith" (Historic Senate Hearings vol III 2175). After the witness, Allen J. Lovenstein, explains to Cohn that of the sixteen defendants, fifteen were Jewish and one was married to a Jew, Cohn answers: "This is all news to me. I don't know the religion of these people, and I don't care. It doesn't matter whether out of 530 people there are 530 Jews or Catholics or Protestants" (Historic Senate Hearings vol III 2176).

Communists, conflated with Jews, were, however, still conflated with Nazis through an understanding of totalitarianism. As such, the SPSI and Cohn routinely asked questions to establish the anti-Semitic attitudes of their witnesses, including witnesses of Jewish ethnicity. In the SPSI interrogation of Sol Aurbach, for instance, Senator Symington asks, "Do you believe in the anti-Semitic purges that have recently developed

in the countries behind the Iron Curtain? Do you approve of that?" (Executive Sessions volume II 10). Aurbach's interrogation is indicative of a general line of questions reserved for Jewish defendants concerning their feelings about Russia's Jewish purges<sup>66</sup>. Their aim was to besmirch the defendants' ethnicity by depicting them as having become apathetic concerning the plight of Soviet Jews due to their Communist affiliation.

Many of these witnesses knew more about the subject than the party line allowed. In William Marx Mandal's testimony (he was a noted political scholar on Russia and Asia) the rebuff of communist anti-Semitism is quite pronounced:

Senator JACKSON. What is your opinion of the anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union?

Mr. MANDEL. Being a Jew, I have certain standards on the basis of which to judge that. I have never encountered an anti-Semitic government in history that had a Jewish member of its cabinet.

Mr. COHN. Who is the member of the Jewish Cabinet?

Mr. MANDEL. Kaganovich, K-a-g-a-n-o-v-i-c-h.

The CHAIRMAN (McCarthy). What is his position?

Mr. MANDEL. He is one of the vice premiers, one of the members of the five inner cabinet under the present administration.

Mr. COHN. I think Senator Jackson's question was addressed to these purges. Do you approve of the anti-Semitic purges?

Mr. MANDEL. I think that is utter nonsense.

Mr. COHN. That is just counter-revolutionary propaganda?

Mr. MANDEL. It is not counter-revolutionary propaganda. It is nonsense. I went down and bought a copy of True, Soviet Labor party. I bought copies of Pravda at the library next to the main public library on 42nd Street. Four days after this thing happened, that comes over by air mail, when our post office doesn't stop it. And on the same front page of the same paper which presented the indictment of these physicians, there was an announcement of the meeting the previous evening of the committee of Judges for Stalin prize awards in the literature and science for this coming year. Among the eleven judges are two men who are well-known to be Jewish.

Mr. COHN. And that is that?

Mr. MANDEL. And many similar things. If you want a lecture for an hour and a half, I would be glad to give it to you.

Interestingly, William Mandel's complaint against the government that interrogates him is two fold. First, they don't know what they're talking about in regards to the actual

events and government of communist Russia, and second, by evoking Pravda and the fact that the U.S. Postal service stops the magazine's distribution, they are engaged in the very same kind of censure that is part of their own indictment of communism as totalitarianism. It is difficult to read Mandel's assertion that he has "never encountered an anti-Semitic government in history that had a Jewish member of its cabinet—whether it is a slight at Roy Cohn, or whether he means the phrase without irony, and simply does not recognize SPSI as a tool for anti-Semitic oppression.

Questions regarding opinions about the Russian purges represented a line of interrogation uniquely reserved for Jewish defendants, but for the SPSI, any activity that bespoke a prejudice against Jews was immediate grounds for suspicion of communist sympathies— whatever the defendant's ethnicity. Against Alfred Puhon, then program manager for "Voice of America," the SPSI makes a case for communist sympathies based on Puhon's cutting off of the Hebrew Language Service in his agency. Cohn asks:

If you cut off Hebrew Language Service, you are not only cutting off the Jewish language service to Israel, but to Jews all over the world. Because is it not a fact that the platters and broadcasts going to Israel were also used as a basis for broadcasts to other Hebrew areas throughout the world?" (644)

During their interrogation (presumably to discover Puhon's communist sensibilities), the SPSI never accused him of anything but cutting service to Hebrew speakers. Essentially, even if Puhon had deliberately cut this service (which he didn't), and they had proved that Puhon was anti-Semitic (which they didn't), they would have proved nothing about his communist sensibilities at all. For the SPSI, however, Puhon's anti-Semitism would have meant his communism and vice versa.

Interestingly enough, Puhon is exonerated before the committee because of the SPSI's shared belief that Israel, Puhon's supposed Hebrew speaking audience, was notoriously

home to a large number of communists (according to the committee). After this baseless assertion, the committee finds it reasonable that Puhon should have ended translation of the broadcast into Hebrew so as to help stop the spread of coded messages to Israeli communists. It is unclear, from the transcripts, why the committee suddenly deemed Israel a potential communist threat, whether they have unspoken grounds for their allegations (such as the domination of Israel's labor party in that country's national politics) or whether they simply believed that Israel, as a Jewish nation, was naturally vulnerable to communism, for instance. It was immaterial to the committee, finally, that Puhon had only been following directions from a superior who had been forced to cut the program due to a lack of funds, that Puhon's responsibility was only in putting that order into practice, or that cutting Hebrew translation of *Voice of America* didn't, one way or the other, have any bearing on Puhon's communism unless the conflation of Communism and Nazism had become so native to American thinking that it had begun to guide domestic policy.

McCarthy's assignment of Roy Cohn to the position of his chief counsel may have been a case of ethnic tokenism meant to defuse allegations of anti-Semitism in the practice of red baiting (a tactic which some biographers attribute to Cohn himself), or he may have become part of McCarthy's investigative committee based on his work with the prosecution against the Rosenbergs and, earlier, Alger Hiss<sup>67</sup>. Whatever the reason for his dramatic rise, once put into position with the Senate subcommittee, Cohn turned out to be a wunderkind at McCarthyian interrogation tactics.

With the introduction of a Jewish interrogator, the methods of McCarthy's interrogation remained just as anti-Semitic (as well as anti-African American, anti-

homosexual, and anti-woman) as those practiced by HUAC where there was no significant Jewish presence on the investigative board. To charges of anti-Semitism, Roy Cohn commonly answered for the SPSI by saying that it wouldn't matter to him if suspects were Jewish, or Catholic or Protestant...even though the testimony collected by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations indicates a tendency to single out minority groups for harassment, especially Jews and homosexuals.

For many Cold War historians, the inordinate number of Jews called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (the House of Representative's more publicized version of SPSI) to present testimony is simply incidental or related to the high percentage of Jews working in the entertainment industry at the time of the investigations<sup>68</sup>. Those accused had their careers ruined for accusations (often false) concerning their political affiliations in America where the right to one's political opinions are supposed to be guaranteed by law. Because of this injustice, the fact that the majority of HUAC's targets were Jews is sublimated to the greater issue of HUAC's flagrant disregard for the basic tenets of a democratic society.

Even in histories devoted to chronicling American anti-Semitism, the persecution signified by HUAC or McCarthyism in general against Jews simply isn't discussed. According to most historians, there was nothing particularly anti-Semitic about the postwar Red Scare. Many historical volumes describe American sentiments and actions taken against Jewish immigrants and communities before WWII, but few exist to describe anti-Semitism in the Fifties. In *The Jewish Threat* (2000), for instance, only two of eleven chapters are given over to describe anti-Semitism in the postwar United States military, and even there, the narrative ends at 1960. Michael N. Dobkowski's work *The*

*Tarnished Dream* (1979) only covers anti-Semitism up until the late 1920s. The sixth volume (“Anti-Semitism in America”) of The American Jewish Historical Society’s *American Jewish History Series* has only one entry out of 38 that dates into the 80s (1980), one that covers the 70s, and only one that specifically covers the 60s. The volume does not mention the House Un-American Activities Committee, its entry on Joseph McCarthy suggests that he was a supporter of American Jews, and the history suggests ultimately, that the anti-communist movement was supportive of Jew/Gentile relations.

Because of his influence in defining American domestic policy, McCarthy himself did not (or perhaps could not) provoke analogy. To accuse McCarthy of acting like a Nazi would have required that America ignore the differentiation it routinely used to sublimate differences between democracy and totalitarianism—a differentiation upon which also depended America’s self image as a virtuous nation whose racial prejudices radically different from those held by the Nazis. Obviously, the immunity afforded McCarthyism is evidence of the Cold War relationship between American nationalism and the deployment of Nazi analogies; censoring America’s enemies required reference to Nazism, but McCarthy, once his reputation fell, was censured through the metaphor of the witch hunt.

The picture painted, by scholarship at least, is that widespread anti-Semitism all but ends with the Second World War. America had learned from the lesson of Hitler’s Germany to be, at least, civil to its Jewish population. Even Holocaust historians face the central question of why the decades of the Fifties and Sixties in America have trouble accounting for the Jewish and American reticence to discuss a since-centralized event in

worldwide Jewish consciousness. The view of Jewish American cultural history most often relied upon is that Jews projected an unnamed ambivalence towards their suffering due to a need to assimilate<sup>69</sup>. According to Hilene Flanzbaum, “For American Jews to identify with the Holocaust would have meant a substantial reversal; they would first have had to extract themselves from the well-blended composite of American identity into which they had seemingly melted” (20). The discourse of Jews as Jews, Jews as victims, or Jewish suffering in relation to public policy has a historical blind spot starting in 1947 and continuing until 1961 without explanation for the omission. Certainly America did not suddenly find itself cured of the anti-Semitism which seemed pathological in *The Authoritarian Personality*. HUAC, SPSI, anti-communism, and the inherent anti-Semitism of red baiting present a context for that historical blind spot: it was not safe to appear Jewish in America lest one risk being singled out by the state as a communist and punished as a Nazi. The need to assimilate for safety was more than just a holdover reaction to Hitler’s Germany. Nor was it safe, if called to testify, to mention anti-Semitism before a committee that was sensitive about its public image and which recognized such accusations as a communist trick.

The abundance of Jewish witnesses forced to give testimony (and whose careers were subsequently ended), the predilection of the McCarthyist tribunals for accusing Jews of anti-Semitism, and the complete lack of any mention of anti-Semitism related to the McCarthy hearings or the House UnAmerican hearings is to say the least odd. If the practice of accusing people of acting like Nazis was already in place (as clearly it must have been if anti-Semitism had become a telling symptom of communism), then the fact that McCarthy and his supporters were not publicly criticized as Nazis when they began



to round up and harass Jews is worthy of note. It is even more interesting that in the years since, history has made no charge of anti-Semitism against McCarthy or his forces: despite the preponderance of Jews as victims of the Red Scare, the Red Scare has nothing to do with America's treatment of its Jews.

Ultimately, what this lack of Nazi analogy to the Red Scare suggests is that the ability to make the charge of being like the Nazis rested firmly in the hands of dominant American culture which held itself to be opposite of totalitarianism, and therefore, Nazism. McCarthy could be (and was) critiqued through the analogy of the witch hunt (sadly, a very American metaphor), but for McCarthyists to have been compared to Nazis in American popular culture would have undermined anti-Communism and the national values upon which the Cold War was built. If McCarthy was like a Nazi in his fight against communism, then communists couldn't be portrayed as resembling Nazis and America could not validate its fight against communism through its defeat of Nazism.

Again, none of this was particularly conscious; in popular culture, America had been charged with the job of defending the world against totalitarianism. America's heroism as well as its enemies were defined and had taken their roles: its communist enemies could be like Nazis, its anti-communist forces simply and definitively could not.

While Holocaust and Cold War historians are reluctant to mention Jewish and anti-Jewish sentiments in the Fifties, the actual historical records of those involved in McCarthyism and those who were called to testify tell a different tale. Of the Hollywood Ten (called before HUAC in 1947), for instance, five were Jews as were over a third of those listed in *Red Channels* (1950) as communists (all of whom were immediately

blacklisted). President Truman, in a memo written to himself, said of Herbert Hoover's FBI, "we want no Gestapo or Secret Police. FBI is tending in that direction" (Kiel 62).

According to Alexander Stephan, prominent emigrants who had fled Nazi Germany were put under surveillance by numerous intelligence agencies, especially the FBI. Stephan's work, *Communazis: FBI Surveillance of German Emigé Writers*, though comprehensive, seems to miss an integral point in that the political oppression which forced many of the Germans to flee Nazi Germany was a reaction to their Jewish ethnic background<sup>70</sup>. Herbert Hoover ordered surveillance for Jews who had become prominent members of America's cultural community, and then handed all of that information off to Joe McCarthy to power his Red Scare. Federal investigators brought before the SPSI commonly confused Jewish meetings, civil rights meetings, and communist meetings. Undercover FBI investigator Joseph Mazei goes so far as to indicate to the SPSI that the Jewish Community Center in Pittsburgh was a training ground for communist saboteurs ("Historical Senate Hearings," Volume V 452).

Critiques of the practices of the anti-communist community were rare at the time of the Red Scare both because of the ensuing national hysteria caused by media coverage which made it seem as though anyone could be a communist, but also because much of the testimony given to the committee was neither actively made public or given clearance that would have allowed the public to investigate on their own<sup>71</sup>. Thus, though the state was spying on Jews, hauling them from their homes, putting them before the nation's leaders, questioning their citizenship, sending them off to prison, deporting them<sup>72</sup>, and in the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, executing them, McCarthyism never took on the stamp of Nazism. Critics of HUAC, whose hearings were against civilians and were,

therefore more public, often cited the committee as a threat to freedom of speech, but it was rare indeed for the critics of J. Edgar Hoover, Joseph McCarthy, and HUAC to trace out similarities to Nazi Germany (Truman only made the connection in that memo to himself)—similarities which should have been fairly apparent.

But if nowhere in the mass media of the McCarthy era were parallels drawn between the various institutions of McCarthyism and Nazi Germany, the rhetoric existed on the floor of the House of Representatives and in front of the SPSI itself. Many of those forced to defend themselves before congressional committees and sub-committees voiced their belief that they were singled out, not only as possible communists, but also as Jews. When American actor Lionel Stander was called before the committee for his testimony in 1953, he began his statement:

I know of a group of fanatics who are desperately trying to undermine the Constitution of the United States by depriving artists and others of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness without due process of law.... I can tell names and cite instances and I am one of the first victims of it.... [This is] a group of ex-Fascists and America-Firsters and anti-Semites, people who hate everybody including Negroes, minority groups and most likely themselves.... [T]hese people are engaged in a conspiracy outside all the legal processes to undermine the very fundamental American concepts upon which our entire system of democracy exists. (Belton 202)

Standar's indictment of those who interrogated him pointed out his concerns about the committee itself; they were Nazis in congressional garb<sup>73</sup>.

In reference to his prolonged stay in Russia, Langston Hughes appeared before the SPSI on March 24<sup>th</sup> of 1953 to explain his visits to Russia and to answer charges of his either being a communist or having communist sensibilities. During this interrogation, Hughes was accused by Roy Cohn of having anti-Semitic sensibilities evidenced by his poem "Hard Luck":

Mr. COHN. We have an awful lot of your writings we want to go over. Just let me ask you about this one thing here. You are concerned about minority rights in this country, is that right?

Mr. HUGHES. Yes, I am.

Mr. COHN. You are concerned about the rights of Jews as well as the rights of Negroes?

Mr. HUGHES. Yes.

Mr. COHN. Did you write a poem called "Hard Luck"? "When hard luck overtakes you, nothing to offer, nothing for you to do, When hard luck overtakes you, nothing to offer, nothing to do, Gather up your fine clothes and sell them to the Jew." Did you write that? (United States Senate volume 2, 993)

The accusation is troubling because, of course, Hughes was not called before the SPSI to answer charges of racism, but communism. Nonetheless, he was forced by a Jewish interrogator to answer charges of anti-Semitism which would have had the effect of branding him a Communist—not because of communist sensibilities but because of his attitude towards Jews.

If the subcommittee's charge was racism, then the irony is, of course, even more troubling: Hughes's appearance before the committee had as much to do with his race as anything else, and especially his role as a prominent artist within the African American community. Hughes didn't, after all, work for the State Department. His work was being used as an example of American Culture abroad in a campaign to show foreign nations that America respected the contributions of its African American citizens—that it was proud of their achievements and open to their value as citizens. American embassies proudly displayed volumes of Hughes's poetry in their libraries. As a result, he fell under the jurisdiction of McCarthy and Cohn and had to stand trial for being a racist and a communist.

McCarthy's harassment of Hughes acts as an example of the methods employed by the anti-Communist movement in bringing its power to bear against advocates for

minority rights and other political issues supported outside mainstream culture. During Hughes's hearing, the poem "Hard Luck" was made to seem equally damning by the SPSI as more obvious communism-inspired poetry like "Goodbye Christ," "The Ballad of Lenin" and "Put One 'S' in USA." It is clear from the particular poems and lines of poetry concentrated on by the SPSI that the committee was not solely concerned with Hughes as a communist.

"Hard Luck" is written by Hughes in the style of a blues song, with lines repeating over and over again. In essence, it tells the story of a man who is down on his luck; he takes his clothes, sells them to a Jew, uses the money to buy whisky, and then bemoans his condition which he recognizes as lower than a mule's. The poem is fairly simple and absolutely bereft of communist, or any other political sentiments, whatsoever. There is simply no reason for the SPSI to have brought it up, and certainly no reason to bring it up along with poems like "Put One More S in U.S.A." which includes lines like:

But we can't win by just talking.  
So let us take things in our hand.  
Then down and away with the bosses' sway—  
Hail Communistic land.  
So stand up in battle and wave our flag on high,  
And shout out fellow workers  
Our new slogan in the sky:  
Put one more S in the U.S.A. (Hughes 238).

If Cohn's goal was to indict Hughes as a communist, he could easily have concentrated on this poem with its obvious implications, or on any of a number of poems with equally open Communistic sentiments. In "The Ballad of Lenin," Hughes writes: Comrade Lenin of Russia/ Speaks from the marble:/ *On guard with the workers forever--/ The world is our room*" (141). Given the ample supply of other available evidence, the use of

“Hard Luck” to indict Hughes is a sign that the SPSI had other intentions than simply revealing communists when calling their witnesses forward.

By fueling accusations against Hughes through poems critiquing the relationship between African Americans and the Jewish American community, the SPSI wanted to condemn him as an anti-religious hypocrite. The hearing served to accuse Hughes of being flippant about minority rights because his poetry, one poem to be exact, suggested that he didn’t care about Jews. Thus, Hughes, as an advocate for minority rights, was undermined by the SPSI as an anti-Semite, and through him, the issue of minority rights dismissed as being supported by communists whose own interests in minority rights were only a hypocritical cover for communist indoctrination.

Because the injustices committed against America’s minorities were committed under the guise of anti-communism America could oppress its minority groups without inviting comparisons between the racist attitudes of Nazi Germany and the racism tolerated by the government of the United States. This contextualizing of racism (and the removal of race from that narrative) ultimately proved necessary because culturally, in a segregated America, the presence of racial prejudice was simply too obvious to avoid. Both before and during the war, the Nazi propaganda machine had struck its chords against America’s own racist attitudes as a demonstration of America’s hypocrisy. According to Michael Birdwell, “The Fuhrer declared that Americans had no right to criticize the Reich or its racial policies because the United States practiced similar discriminatory acts” (14). After the war and the images of the camps, the United States simply could not appear racist, either to itself or to other members of the global community for whom its “democracy” was now to serve as the new definition of a virtuous world order.

The subject of racism, however, did not simply go away, and as McCarthyism waned and issues of race gained national attention, the guise of anti-communism increasingly failed to conceal the nation's injustices. National narratives began to develop from the nation's counter-cultures which accentuated the commonalities between America and the totalitarian regimes it claimed as its adversaries. Their goal was not to show Americans acting badly or unjustly, but to repudiate them for acting like Nazis. The reminder, it was hoped, would correct the nation's ill treatment of its ethnic minorities.

The analogies to Nazism being made by civil groups and advocates continued from a narrative concerning the war and Hitler that had been quelled, temporarily, by the anti-Communist movement. Whereas the mass media surrounding camp liberation had inadvertently confused the image of Nazism and modified its racist connotation (by overemphasizing the political and national identity of the victims of the Nazis' crimes as well as their imperial motivation), for many Americans, especially Americans from minority groups, the main evil of Hitler, and therefore, the reason we had gone to war in the first place, was to attack a nation which epitomized state-sanctioned racism. As Joe Louis supposedly once said, "There may be a whole lot wrong with America, but there's nothing that Hitler can fix" (Carson 36). Langston Hughes (in 1943, nearly a decade before being interrogated by the SPSI) described America as a place where things were getting better for African Americans, and was, therefore, a place worth defending by African Americans:

This segment [America's racists], however, is not all of America. If it were, millions of Negroes would have no heart for this war in which we are now engaged. If it were, we could see no difference between our ideals and Hitler's, in so far as our own dark lives are concerned. But we know, on the other hand, that America is a land in transition. (Hughes 501)

The hope of World War II entertained by groups who had seen America's own essentialist attitudes, especially its attitude of white supremacy, as predominately dystopian prewar, was that the nation's encounter with the Nazis would force America to recognize the faults inherent to dealing with its minority populations through the lens of traditional power structures and definitions. Postwar, as racism and oppression continued to flourish, the entrenchment of Cold War America's racism began to become more apparent even when sublimated in the rhetoric of anti-Communism and especially when the political machine of the Second Red Scare began to fall apart with the downfall of Joe McCarthy after the infamous Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954 in which Joseph McCarthy's tactics came under public scrutiny resulting in the senator's censure.

When the resistance to change its racist attitudes became apparent, it caused deep tension between proponents of racist American structures, advocates for civil rights, advocates for the fight against communism, and the increasing momentum building behind the movement for minority rights in institutions like the Supreme Court and the White House. As Kenneth B. Clark pointed out in 1966:

The competitive struggle between world Communism and the American concept of democracy demanded an American response to this embarrassing and easily exploited violation of democratic ideals. America risked standing before the world as a hypocrite or resting its claims for leadership on might alone, subordinating any democratic ideological basis of appeal. The international struggle for the first time clearly placed racists on the defensive, in grave danger of being classed as subversives in their threat to America's ideological power. (272)

As issues of race were forced to the surface, first through the failures of McCarthyism and second, by decisions of American lawmakers which granted greater rights to America's ethnic minorities, they demanded redress and critique from those who began to doubt America's differentiation between its own policies and those of its totalitarian



enemies. At the same time, these issues of race required their being defined by racist America in such a way that segregation and its supporters did not appear anti-democratic (and therefore, fascist). Often, this tension manifested as a rhetorical fight between civil rights advocates on one side and racists on the other with the former group attempting to remind the latter that such attitudes were reminiscent of Nazi Germany and with the latter group accusing the former, as Cohn had Hughes, of being communists or socialists (implying, as well, Nazism through a totalitarian designation).

Civil rights advocate Ben H. Bagdikian, for instance, in his article “We Went South: October 1957” wrote:

While Hitler’s 1935 Nuremberg marriage laws defined “a Jew” as “anyone who descended from at least three grandparents who were racially Jews...” the racial laws of some Southern states make the Nuremberg edict sound like wild liberalism. In Alabama, a “negro” is defined as “a person of mixed blood descended on the part of the father or mother from negro ancestry without reference to or limit of time or number of generation removed. (Carson 395)

By citing the Nuremberg Code, Bagdikian recognizes that, as racist as the Nazis had been, Alabama was worse.

What Bagdikian finds truly disconcerting about the laws in Southern states is not, or not just, that they are unfair or ridiculous, but that they are more unfair and ridiculous than America’s measurement for oppression: Nazi Germany. The state had employed Nazis in its metaphor for the danger of un-American dissidents and the dissidents responded by using Nazis in their metaphor for the dangers of the American state. The use of Nazism for ethical comparison was becoming increasingly universal in political language outside the auspice of the American government.

Universality, however, produces problems. In general, situations that were made analogous to those of Nazi Germany were subordinated in the comparison. When John

Howard Griffin, in *Black Like Me* (1961) assessed the experience of being black in America, his goal was to get closer to the subject and to become the people he studied. A comparison to Nazi Germany in such an experiment would be totally out of place. It leads in the exact opposite direction of Griffin's intended goal. Rather than his trying to give the black perspective as if he were black, it ends up having the effect of his giving the black perspective as it would be were he a Jew in Nazi Germany.

In the heat of his description, however, Griffin naturally falls back on just this kind of analogy:

What do we fear? I could not say exactly. It was unlikely the Klan would come riding down on us. We merely fell into the fear that hangs over the state, a nameless and awful thing. It reminded me of the nagging, focusless terror we felt in Europe when Hitler began his marches, the terror of talking with Jews (and our deep shame of it). (Griffin 72)

Griffin's prose certainly does not require stiling so as to convey the horrors of racism. When one reads passages such as, "The white boys would race through too fast. They would see a man or a boy or a woman alone somewhere along the street and the lust to beat or to kill would flood into them. Some frightful thing had to climax this accelerating madness," there is no need for a reference to Nazism to see the inherent terror in the situation as it is described (Griffin 70). Part of the success of *Black Like Me* is the beat-like elegance of Griffin's language. Up until the point where he mentions Hitler and the Nazis, he had described in powerful detail taking a bus from New Orleans to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, being forced to stay on the bus during the bathroom stop, having to find a friendly place so as to get himself off the street, and the horror of a neighborhood where, at any moment, a truckload of white men might arrived with a desire to do harm against a community that is not permitted to defend itself. Life for African Americans in 1959

Mississippi, as described by Griffin, is terrible all in and of itself. Yet, Griffin falls back on the comparison to Germany, if not out of necessity, then out of rote validation.

Reference to Hitler is necessary because it is the language of American political culture's condemnation. The invective depends upon the comparison for the degree of moral outrage which it implies.

Perhaps the most famous of all civil rights advocates, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote concerning his resistance to state laws, in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," "We should never forget that everything that Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany" (Young 337). With the powerful rhetoric of King, the analogy to Nazism becomes a rebuke—a reminder to his critics that laws do not have ultimate authority which belongs, instead, to the human conscience. Laws, particularly the laws of the Nazis, may actually be used to defend iniquity instead of justice. In that same letter, King goes on to say:

How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. (336)

In his attempt to separate one kind of law, the just, from the other, the unjust, King illustrates the necessary difficulty in differentiating between the essential and the context dependent. The law is just if it "uplifts human personality," but such is obviously dependent on the context of the particular human—segregation uplifts the personality of the bigot after all, but it is not just. Thus, the law must appeal to a higher authority, some essential law of which human law must be some kind of mirror—"eternal law" or

“natural law”—but those two are open to interpretation. This is not a failure on King’s part. His rhetoric here is devoted to reminding his readers of eternal values and otherworldly standards against which segregation cannot hold. It’s the rhetoric of Paul the apostle, not of Hegel the dialectician. Nonetheless, for those who find themselves predisposed to a real world example of the unjust law against which to measure other laws, King offers an example. Not surprisingly, he cites Nazi Germany.

King’s position exemplifies the rhetoric of civil rights in its capacity to expose injustice. The assumption underlying “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” or *Black Like Me* is that if racist Americans were simply forced to confront the similarities between their own thinking and the thinking of Nazis they would realize that their racism was intolerable. It worked to a certain degree, but failed in important points. Civil rights laws were passed, but often those who attempted to act under the protection of those laws were violently abused or murdered.

What did it matter if the South’s voter registration laws were repealed if those who went to Mississippi to register African Americans to vote were murdered without repudiation? It meant that, despite the acknowledgment of the Federal Government that the laws of the South were unjust, there was still not acknowledgment by racists in America that their attitudes were in need of change. Moreover, as the Federal government refused to intervene to uphold its laws, it meant that the laws existed on book, but not in the streets. The result was a growing uneasiness with dominant power structures and an increased skepticism concerning the mechanisms of civil rights activists like King. Part of this uneasiness manifested in a change in the Nazi metaphor—it did not serve to remind racist Americans that their racism resembled Nazism because, from

the point of view of those who saw civil rights as ineffectual, racist Americans didn't seem to care that they were acting like Nazis.

In his examination of ghettoization in the American north in "The Harlem Ghetto," James Baldwin argues against the validity of Nazism as a means of ethical comparison by setting it against its standard cultural usage. He harangues those who required a reference to Nazism in order to see the iniquity of the situation under their consideration. In doing so, he makes an argument against essentialist validation by endorsing a morality totally dependent on context and examined on a case-by-case basis.

If Bagdikian's depiction of African American life in the American South had clearly made the comparison to the experiences of Jews in Nazi Germany; Baldwin's sentiment is comparable for African Americans in the North. However, by divorcing the issues Baldwin criticized the northern white community for its dissociation from the issues of civil rights because of the feeling that the situation in the northern states was not as bad as it was in the southern states. The injustice is unconscionable, he argues, no matter if it is incomparable; it should be protested on its own basis. "Even if Birmingham is worse, no doubt Johannesburg, South Africa, beats it by several miles, and Buchenwald was one of the worst things that ever happened in the entire history of the world" (Baldwin 69). The situation in the North is not comparable to Buchenwald, but it is still bad. Moreover, as Buchenwald is one of the worst things, marking it as an ethical pole, nothing will ever be comparable to Buchenwald. A society can still be cruel, unjust, or ridiculous on its own merits.

Baldwin's writing describes an anti-essentialist, context dependent point of view. His concern in his essays comes back to the danger of easy answers which produce platitudes

and structures for meaning, but which do not create truth. In his essay on Stowe and Wright, "Everybody's Protest Novel," Baldwin writes:

But that battered word, truth, having made its appearance here, confronts one immediately with a series of riddles and has, moreover, since so many gospels are preached, the unfortunate tendency to make one belligerent. Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom for fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with devotion to Humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are nutritiously blood-thirsty. (15)

The message is clear enough even before he begins to link up certain characteristics to their sentimental, essentialist definition by capitalization. Truth depends. It depends on situations, it depends on relationships, and it is never the same between people and between experiences. In the terms Baldwin, here, describes, the Nazis, in believing in a Cause, created one of the worst things ever: Buchenwald. Thus, belief in a Cause, with a capital C, is the real danger.

Baldwin's examples of Johannesburg and Buchenwald, however, show the same logic underpinning the kind of comparison made by Griffin, Bragdikian, and King.

Johannesburg, South Africa is a natural extension of his argument because he is discussing racism against Africans. He might also have talked about the Herero genocide or the atrocities committed by the Belgians in the Congo, or any number of other foreign examples of violence against Africans (Mussolini in Ethiopia provided a more cogent example than Hitler), but it is still a freedom (or lack of freedom) that can be legislated, a fulfillment (or total absence of fulfillment) that can be charted.

The reference to Buchenwald, then, is entirely alien to the argument. It isn't obviously part of the frame of reference for African Americans living in the North at all except in a broader sense of oppression and racism—not specific oppression or racism,

but their essentialist counterparts (Oppression and Racism with capital letters). Buchenwald is summoned precisely because it is an epitome, an iniquity that can be charted as “one of the worst things.” Thus Baldwin marks Nazism as an ethical benchmark utilized even in his argument against ethical benchmarks. Even for an author who sees the search for the contextualized truth as the novelist’s primary concern, Buchenwald is singled out as a place that epitomizes inhumanity.

Baldwin argues against appeals to essential values by anticipating and countering the essentialist position as a counter-argument, but the anticipation implies that he already knows how an essential value will work against his argument. His allowance for an ethical epitome, by making reference to Buchenwald, means that he, too, at least understands Nazism as an evil (perhaps the only evil) independent of context. At the same time, he recognizes that a belief in essential value endangers the chance for change in America’s attitude towards race. He is attacking all belief in essential value, save the kind that makes Buchenwald “one of the worst things,” because Buchenwald is a landmark for injustice.

Moreover, Baldwin knows that his audience will accept the logic of his argument and not deem his seemingly innocuous inclusion of Buchenwald as paradoxical to his rhetoric. In fact, the use of Buchenwald as an example acts as validation for an argument in which its embedding is unneeded complication. As the epitome of racism, Buchenwald, and by extension Nazism, is always appropriate, even in arguments against essentialism and epitome. Baldwin’s argument, made in the early 60s, anticipates the kind of argument that will soon become the prominent rhetoric of context dependency, as opposed to rhetoric dependent upon comparison to an immutable and essential value. It

also anticipates the problem with this context dependent rhetoric: the need to appeal to an essential value for validation to keep it from slipping into pure babble.

The point, here, is not to provide a history of racism in America from Red Scare to Civil Rights to the Black Power movement. Rather I mean to point out the consistency of the rhetoric between these disparate groups and conflicting viewpoints. As King, for instance, attacks Southern laws through the analogy of Nazism, King himself is attacked through that same analogy. Kenneth B. Clark, for instance, wrote of the civil rights movement and its policy of non-violent protest, “The willingness of an oppressed people to protest and suffer, passively or assertively, without bitterness or with ‘love for the oppressors’ seems to have influence only where the conscience of the majority of the society can be reached. In Hitler’s Germany the Jews suffered nonviolently without stirring Nazi repentance” (Young 287). Again, Hitler is the measure of injustice. Writing in 1967 of the Watts riots, Andrew Kopkind writes, “The ‘power structures’ of the Mississippi Delta may have trembled when they heard ‘Aint Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round,’ but the one in Cook County was unmoved. It had better weapons: an anti-poverty program, an Uncle Tom congressman, available jobs, and huge stores of tolerance. When that failed, as it did, there were armies of police and soldiers prepared for final solutions” (300). Where King attempts to remind American racists of the similarities between their laws and those of the Nazis, Kopkind drops the repudiation through example and makes the statement an equivalence: the attitude of dominant white America *is* Nazism. Reminding Americans that they are acting like Nazis for advocates of Black Power like Kopkind is pointless—what’s necessary is for the victims of racism



to be reminded that theirs is a fight against fascist oppression, the very same kind that led to the camps.

These anti-fascist sentiments are suffused throughout the speeches and manifestos of the Black Power movement and are central to the basic tenets upon which the Black Power movement was founded. Stokely Carmichael, a protégée of Martin Luther King, Jr, and chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), coined the phrase Black Power in 1966 to designate a kind of resistance to oppression alternative to the passive resistance preached by Reverend King. In a speech given at U.C. Berkeley later in the same year as the phrase's introduction he explained the need for Black Power as self liberation to a crowd of students and social activists. During that speech, he employed Nazism to describe the unlikelihood of white America to recognize its own racism and, therefore, the need for African Americans to force the change themselves.

According to Stokely:

Any of the Nazi prisoners who admitted, after he was caught and incarcerated, that he committed crimes, that he killed all the many people that he killed, he committed suicide. The only ones who were able to stay alive were the ones who never admitted that they committed a crime against people - that is, the ones who rationalized that Jews were not human beings and deserved to be killed, or that they were only following orders. (*Say It Plain*)

Stokely's argument is explanation of the ambivalence of white Americans who cannot, like the Nazis, admit to their racist crimes or else risk their own self-definition as virtuous. If they admit to the appalling condition of African Americans in the United States then they will have to simultaneously admit to their own wrong doing—deeds so horrible that acknowledging them will necessitate suicide to escape the guilt.

Stokely's sentiments are mirrored among other African Americans who began to tire of King's passivity after the passage of civil rights laws failed to effect change in the

social conditions of African Americans. Leroi Jones, who changed his name later to Amiri Baraka, offered in his 1964 essay “the last days of the American empire (including some instructions for black people)”:

You know what ‘Germans’ still means. First of all, now, it means liar. No matter what the man can tell you, e.g., ‘I was head of the anti-Nazi forces, etc., etc.,’ the word “German” is sufficient to give any story the shakes. What you will say. What...are you talking about...aren’t you a German? And that’s the end of that. In a few years, ‘American’ will have that connotation, for the rest of the world. (194)

Jones’s point here is that the culpability of America as a nation will extend to its individuals, that they will be unable to excuse their individual action because of the inequities committed by the nation to which they belong and that it will be impossible for white Americans to differentiate themselves from other white Americans who oppress, segregate, lynch, and otherwise treat the African American community with violence. The model for this inevitable association is Nazi Germany—thus, the Germans cannot claim to be outside of national responsibility for the horrible crimes there, and white Americans will not be able to claim individual responsibility for crimes committed against African Americans in the United States. Why Nazi Germany? Because the crimes committed there are equivalent, according to Jones, to the crimes committed in America.

The employment of Nazism by the civil rights and, later, Black Power movements was a continuation of a process that had been ongoing in American culture since the end of the Second World War. It is dangerously compelling to think that Nazism, as implying homicidal racism, had finally come to the fore when used by Carmichael, that the previous implications of Nazism as communism, authoritarianism, global imperialism, etc, had been misguided, that the rhetoric of Black Powers leaders like

Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, Huey Newton, or Leroi Jones /Amiri Baraka were righting the mistakes of twenty years of bad argument through analogy, or that Nazism belonged to arguments about race relations and that its mismanagement was simply the result of its being used in appropriate arguments. This is simply not the case.

Employment of the Nazi analogy was used in arguments about racial politics for the same reason that it had been used in other political arguments: it was the only available metaphor for evil which was recognizable in mass culture and, therefore, the only viable symbol of evil against which an entire culture could rally. It continued, however, to carry the same connotations and imply the same logical problems when it was used by Black Power revolutionaries and Black nationalists as it had when it had been used to sell Korea and Nuclear proliferation to American culture at large. Moreover, when it began to be used to also imply racism, it did not cease to imply fascism, totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, authoritarianism, global imperialism, or any other political characteristic for which it had previously been called upon to describe.

It would be fallacious to lump Black Power groups and leaders together under one banner as there were significant differences in the aims and rhetorical strategies even within a single group or even a single figure in the movement over time. The metaphor's political operation is, perhaps, best exemplified when it is employed to discuss race, because it is at that point when the various factors of the symbol seem most at odds with one another precisely because so many of the features that are implied by the Nazi analogy seem to have no business being involved in questions of race, and yet, they continue to be implied by the metaphor just the same. An evocation of Nazism was, throughout its postwar history, an evocation of America's enemy. Thus, to evoke Nazism

to critique America meant that one had to simultaneously understand one's self as the enemy of Nazism and the enemy of America. It is no wonder, then, that many Black Power revolutionaries considered themselves socialists and therefore opposed to both fascism and American capitalism. They were far less likely to identify themselves as communists because Communism continued to carry the totalitarian, and Nazi, connotation.

The term 'nationalism' was used frequently by Black Power revolutionaries, and was one of the cornerstone arguments for the rhetoric of Malcolm X. In fact, the Black Power movement could as easily be described as a Black Nationalist movement—though the meaning of the two phrases, even in their usage in revolutionary rhetoric was quite different. Black Power was used to imply self determination; Black Nationalism implied the desire for land to be awarded by the American government in order to create a sovereign state, sometimes discussed as separate from the United States, other times discussed as part of the United States.

The two terms were often used interchangeably. Nationalism was generally employed without implying a connection to fascism--partly because of the spirit of pan-Africanism that accompanied the gaining of independence by a large number of African countries. Martin Luther King had phrased the problem in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" before civil rights had turned into a revolutionary spirit, "We have waited more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter" (335). Of course, by the mid 60's the victims of Hitler, the Jews, had defended their own

sovereignty in Israel—the victims of the Nazis had succeeded in their nationalist dreams, why then shouldn't the victims of the American Nazis succeed through the spirit of nationalism as well?

But if nationalism was, for many African American nationalists, a term free of the fascism against which they fought, it crossed the line occasionally to its more dire implications. In an interview with *The Movement* from 1968, Black Panther's leader Huey Newton explained the meaning behind Revolutionary nationalism and its differentiation from Cultural nationalism, as follows:

There are two kinds of nationalism, revolutionary nationalism and reactionary nationalism. Revolutionary nationalism is first dependent upon a people's revolution with the end goal being the people in power. Therefore to be a revolutionary nationalist you would by necessity have to be a socialist. (370)

Cultural nationalism, or, as Newton calls it, “pork chop nationalism” represents the cultural reclamation of an African past and identity through culture (370). His example is Papa Doc in Haiti. Thus, nationalism, in its cultural form, doesn't mean a new nation, as it did for Malcolm X, but a recognition of the need to acknowledge one's roots in the nation of one's ancestors. For Newton, revolutionary nationalism doesn't mean a separate state either—he obviously implies nationalism to mean a revolution that destroys the old state of American democracy by instituting a new state, within the borders of the old, that operates through socialism.

His rhetoric is interesting in that he makes this revolutionary nationalism equivalent to socialist nationalism and sets it up as the enemy of the people and then finishes the equivalency with the proclamation, “The Black Panther party is a revolutionary Nationalist group” (371). To wit, one must wonder the difference between a ‘socialist nationalist’ and a ‘national socialist.’ Again, the goal is not disparagement. Huey

Newton was not a Nazi—but how easily, nonetheless, even a figure of revolutionary nationalism, like Newton, falls prey to the obvious roles that the Nazi metaphor requires—if the Black Panthers wants to be the enemy of America then they must wear the trappings of the role. They must arm themselves, they must wear the uniform, and they must, strangely enough, be socialist nationalists.

Looking at the path taken in describing race relations in the United States following World War II and America's fight against a racist enemy, the implications are quite clear. The Nazis served as an example of social evil even when more profound examples existed. Moreover, their reference dramatically shaped the arguments into which they were evoked. If White America is a Nazi state, then its prisons are concentration camps, and the convicts incarcerated inside them are suffering under oppression and not punishment. The fight against such a state is naturally virtuous, and socialism is justified under the banner. Moreover, glaring inconsistencies can be, and must be, navigated. To be the enemy of America as a Nazi country, one must find a way to play the part of America's Nazi enemy simultaneously by playing the part of the enemy of the Nazis. To evoke the metaphor is to step into this complex and strange game of symbols and implications, and it is made no less clear just because the issue is race and the nature of the Nazis' evil was their racism.

Lastly, the issue of race is just one example among many into which the Nazis were evoked. Like the anti-war movement, the issue of Black Nationalism had to find a way to make meaning anew out of the Nazi symbol while contending with previous meanings and meanings that were being made concurrently in disparate political arenas. The Black Nationalist movement's claims often bordered on those of the anti-war movement, just as

the anti-war movement often made arguments concerning race. But even when these arguments didn't specifically reference each other, their definition of Nazism was culled together from the same cultural store, which they altered through their usage. McCarthy, for instance, had made it impossible not to evoke Communism when referencing Nazism despite the gulf of difference between the two political philosophies. Outside the examples I have illuminated here, other examples exist as well in other political arenas. Analysis of the American slavery system evoked Nazism in Stanley Elkins work *Slavery* (1959) as did analysis of the American housewife in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). When Charles Manson inaugurated himself as America's nightmare, he entered a courtroom with a swastika carved into his forehead.

The examples I have chosen are meant to illuminate the systematic nature of the process by which an evocation affects the rhetoric into which it is evoked. Moreover, in order to describe the way that America's definition of Nazism affected its nation sense of utopian values, I have attempted to follow the use of Nazism through a specific theme. First Nazism was used as a metaphor for evil in order to demonize the Nazis themselves. Then it was used to demonize America's wartime enemies after World War II, followed by an expanding of its scope from wartime enemy to peacetime rival followed soon after by the use of Nazi analogy to justify America's domestic policy. Eventually, the rhetoric ceased to be controlled by the state and became used in critiques of the state. The circle of its usage grew ever larger from wartime enemy to all foreign enemies to all state enemies to all political enemies including those defined outside of official state politics. These particular example, Nazism in relation to the rhetoric related to communism, anti-Communism, revolutionary nationalism and socialism, have provided a description of the

methodology by which the Nazi analogy is used in an ever broadening scope to finally prove ubiquitous—imminently appropriate for all American definitions of evil.

The analysis made through the example of American politics, however, has not been, and could not have been, exhaustive. The choice of examining these political movements in terms of their anti-Nazi rhetoric was a selection made by favoring extremes. America should have been able to demonize communist Russia based on its ability to infiltrate, its human rights violations against its own citizens, and the very real danger it posed in the nuclear stalemate. Likewise, analogies to Nazism are absolutely unnecessary in order to depict racism or war as dangerous social ills.

These are subjects where the definition of right and wrong should have been rather self-evident...and yet, in each case, analogies to Nazism are relied upon to make their moral points and to describe a dystopian world view. This is precisely because, as Richard Rorty suggests in his concept of a liberal utopia, right and wrong have ceased to be self-evident. Only Nazism serves to establish a stable definition of evil; the insistence upon solidity in regards to other definitions of right and wrong increasingly is taken as denoting dystopian evaluative structures in the post World War II world. The definition of utopia became, after the Second World War, liberal in the sense meant by Richard Rorty: virtue defined as open-mindedness and freedom from prejudice. The singular vision of the world and its values as supplied by Nazism all but demands, in its demonization postwar, that singular visions be abandoned as dystopian.

These extreme examples imply an ever-enlarging scope: a suggestion of just how far reaching the usage of Nazi analogies may be utilized, but as the analysis centers on a single theme, it, unfortunately, risks the impression of limited scope: analyzing Nazi



analogies as they were used to further the various political causes defined by America's relationship to Russia or through America's discussion of race risks excluding other causes, both those equally political and those a-political. What I have tried to suggest, though, is a reasonable description of why and how the Nazi analogy comes into usage, what it does to the ethical argument into which it is summoned, and what it does to causes or individuals who are the subjects of the comparison. In short, I have provided a description of Nazi analogies and their effect on American ethics by looking at a specific ethical problem from which a general case can be made to extrapolate out to other ethical problems.

If, however, ubiquity throughout American ethical rhetoric is the goal of this analysis, then the argument must, by necessity, expand beyond the political borders (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War. It must address crypto-Nazis, and safety Nazis, soup Nazis, and femi-Nazis. It must deliver up some reason why the enemy of Indiana Jones must be a Nazi, why "Spring Time for Hitler" doesn't offend an American audience, and why sado-masochists dress up in SS regalia for sexual titillation. What has been described, thus far, is how to analyze analogies to Nazism, their use and their scope, in a scaled down feature of American culture—ubiquity demands that the analogies, and their implications, be discussed in the state we now find them: suffused throughout American culture, synonymous with evil, imminently appropriate to the point of being obligatory, and finally, meaningless.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE REPERCUSSIONS OF UBIQUITY:

#### A CONTEXT FOR EVERY EVIL AND AN EVIL FOR EVERY CONTEXT

The intersection of Jean Baudrillard's concerns about simulacra and Richard Rorty's concerns about a liberal utopia are ominous for a definition of national ethics. Clearly, the move towards increasing open-mindedness in American culture is both a result of the nation's encounter with the Nazis and also supported by rhetoric which evokes the Nazis through analogy. The liberal utopia, as described by Rorty, is, then, a reaction to a definition of evil derived through the example of Nazism. For McCarthy and his followers, for Angela Davis, for protesters against nuclear war, and for the audience of World War II movies and who then supported America's aggressive foreign military policy in the name of the patriotism that those movies inspired, the goal as expressed in their arguments and entertainment was clearly to act in ways opposite to their understanding of Nazism.

Even as all these groups shared the same goal, they did not share the same understanding of Nazism. Moreover, the definition of Nazism used in each case had been developed from the numerous contexts into which it had previously been evoked. Nazism had become, to use the term coined by Baudrillard, hyperreal—it was not Nazism itself that was evoked, but a model of Nazism that was in the process of continuous manufacture and revision by the national culture. “Real” Nazis had very little to do with this model, except in their capacity to evoke the nostalgia of an actual definition of evil. Perhaps most importantly, Nazism was not used as a measure of accuracy for the model's depiction.

Rorty's analysis describes the general tenor of American society such that tolerance towards others' beliefs and cultures is heralded as the key for utopian social thought. The mechanism for this tolerance is, for Rorty, irony: the ability to respect a belief that is opposite one's own even when it precludes one's belief. Irony is "to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created" (Rorty xvi). Rorty's irony differs chiefly from earlier models in that it does not present a particular belief as right and others as in need of revision (the way that Kierkegaard does with Socrates versus the Sophists, or Christ versus the Romans), but rather, posits right and wrong as obsolete terms—all cultures and beliefs have equal claim to the value of being right depending upon the context in which they are utilized based on a kind of intuition about right and wrong developed through experience of alternative viewpoints. According to Rorty:

"For the liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question, 'Why not be cruel?'—no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible... Anybody who thinks that there are well-grounded theoretical answers to this sort of question—algorithms for resolving moral dilemmas of this sort—is still, in his heart, a theologian or metaphysician. (Rorty xv)

The point here isn't that liberal ironists are cruel, but that they avoid cruelty through an ethical sense trained by irony.

What Rorty loses in this analysis is the sense of the incorrect or, to be more precise, a description of the position of evil. The ironic mode was posited as the domain of moral instruction: it suggests that one speak the language of the morally offensive so as to educate them and change their ethics. If every epistemology is equally deserving of respect, given the context, then no position can be definitively incorrect (regardless of

context), and there can be no morality to instruct; there is no evil. Baudrillard claims that such a system is likely to become nostalgic for fascism precisely because, he reasons, it is a fascist impulse to make definitive assertions: to become in Rorty's terms a metaphysician or a theologian by appealing to values that are above context. A system without notions of good and evil, but based, rather, on propriety, is a system that yearns, according to Baudrillard, for another, and opposite, system in which ethical values are predetermined.

What a culture wants when it acts simultaneously in accordance with Rorty's concept of liberal utopia and Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal is for something to be evil no matter how or when it is referenced. They desire such a value precisely because of its capacity to stabilize the ever shifting moral judgments of a mercurial ethical system dependent constantly on immediate and unique contexts for validation. What it creates are works that promote that vision of hyperreality so that the works from which the culture draws its ironic intuition are already manufactured to complicate that ironic vision in their need for criteria for ethical evaluation

As I've pointed out in previous chapters, Orwell described in his essay "Politics and the English Language" that the characteristic of evil, after the war, became associated with the term "fascism" and became a ubiquitously available term throughout political rhetoric to describe a system which one did not agree with. It was useful in both providing invectives and for validating one's prejudice against whatever form of government or political behavior one needed to castigate. Thus, if one did not like the policies of Czechoslovakia or the Labor party, one needed only call them fascists to

provide a denunciation of their politics as well as validation for the denunciation (after all, what could be worse than to say that a political group was acting like fascists?).

Orwell's complaint echoes Walther Benjamin's observation about the degradation of presence through over contextualization. The impossibility of art retaining its capacity to connect, through personal experience, the individual to transcendent meaning is a product, for Benjamin, of art's capacity, in the age of mechanical reproduction, to be shown in contexts in which it was never intended. Art, put to use in political contexts, becomes propaganda, but regardless of the particular context, over-contextualization has destroyed original transcendent meaning. Orwell applies this principle to the evils of fascism: over-contextualization has made fascists into papier-mâché Mephistopheleses—a process whose mechanisms would later be described by Baudrillard under the term “hyperreal”.

Orwell's argument about fascism is that after the Crown, Communism, the policies of France, the immigration policies of the United States of America, and the traffic cop down the street have all been denounced as fascists, what could the term ‘fascist’ possibly mean except only that it is an insult? Resemblance to historic fascism (like the kind practiced by the recently defeated enemy) ceased to be prerequisite for the term's usage. In fact, the ubiquity of the comparison had two functions: it made the particular evil of the comparison unimportant next to its resemblance to fascism and it belittled the danger of fascism by universalizing it.

Baudrillard describes this deterioration of historical precedent as a condition in which historical accuracy is traded for a kind of continuity of depiction. It ceases to matter in a culture suffused by simulacra that the various references in the world do not resemble the

historical events, people, or movements to which they are presumed to refer. Instead, and it is upon this point that Baudrillard chiefly differs from both Orwell and Benjamin, what is important is that the simulacra are consistent with the other elements of reference—that they maintain the same tenor, the same tone, that they carry the same connotation, or that they present the same information. Their validity is no longer a function of their comparability to the real, but to the hyperreal. Correct or incorrect is only a matter of acting in accordance with what has already been said or depicted; accuracy, in the sense of correctly employing the analogy, is utterly meaningless.

Ultimately, the stable definition of evil as a thing exemplified by the Nazis is lost, and as it is this particular definition that anchors ethics for a liberal utopia, with it goes the ethics in total. When a reference to the Nazis is made in American culture, what actually is being evoked? The Nazis of *Schindler's List*? Knowledge gleaned from a visit to the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C.? The images of the atrocities canonized by camp liberation films? Movies like *Swing Kids*, *Hellboy*, *Wizards*, *Apt Pupil*, *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*, or *Marathon Man*? Even if someone insists that the Nazis to which they refer to are those of history, it remains unclear as to who is responsible for supplying that history, and who is capable of supplying it in its pure historical form? Documentaries which describe the occultism of Himmler? Post war propaganda? The preeminence of Mengele in America's consciousness to the exclusion of all the other Nazi doctors? Where does the "real" history of Nazism come from in a culture that is saturated by references to Nazism, real, metaphoric, and outright fictional? Is it subject to change, and does it have the capacity to develop independently of the popular culture that explains the Nazis and provides visions of their historical milieu? *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of*

*the Lost Ark* tell us that Hitler is fascinated by the occult—was he, or is that something that simply drove the plot of a movie? Forced to flee Germany after the Nazis began liquidating opposition in the party, Otto Strasser told the American Office of Strategic Services that Hitler forced his niece to urinate and defecate on him—is that more accurate<sup>74</sup>?

In American film, the United States wins the war and rescues the world. In reality, the sacrifice of the Russians far outweighed that of America; when Americans speak of the defeat of Hitler and the Nazis are they thinking of the victories shared with the Russians in the real world or the victories America gained single-handedly as depicted in our cinema? These aren't questions of accuracy between an image of Nazism and actual events, but rather the ability for an image to agree with public knowledge of actual events—which are often generated by previous images and which, just as often, refuse to yield to new data, and remain misinterpretations motivated by politics rather than history and information which is simply incorrect. Anything that disagrees with public knowledge is aberrant and controversial; it doesn't matter whether it happens also to be historically true. Ultimately, this means that in describing 'postwar' America, we are describing both American culture as it follows from its fictional World War II against equally fictional Nazis and the culture as if follows from its historical and real war against Nazi Germany. As to their effect on American culture, the two wars (one real, one fictional) are interchangeable.

Rorty's description of utopia and its mechanisms all but demands the Nazis become the American national metaphor for evil. If evil is necessary, and good is described as tolerance, then clearly evil must be understood as a function of intolerance, and the figure

of evil must be drawn from the most intolerant figures of history. The Nazis are perfect candidates for this role because, not only is their intolerance widespread, but it is also homicidal. Moreover, the Nazis were depicted as defeated by America, marking them not only as a figure of evil but also marking their defeat as an act of goodness. Thus, the Nazi stands for both a figuration of personal evil and as justification for the virtues of patriotism.

The figure of the Nazi isn't necessarily unique in this system—Rorty's system marks all intolerance as evil, but Rorty's system also invites, through irony, tolerance of the intolerance: if we are to approach utopian ideals than we must be tolerant of all possible viewpoints (including those that are not tolerant of ours)—this complication is the very reason that the tolerance to be practiced is deemed 'ironic'. The evil of the Nazis is immune to this irony precisely because of its intensity (or the intensity of its representation which quickly becomes indistinguishable from the thing it represents), its belief in nationally regulated value (as opposed to individual evaluation), and because liberalism's shift from dystopian to a utopian mindset is partially resultant from the horrors of the camps and the general understanding of the rigid, anti-liberal mindset that motivated the murder of Europe's Jews.

Are other evils intense enough to stand in for the evil of intolerance? Possibly, though such models would have a difficult time rivaling the unique position of Nazism for this role. Even the American Southern plantation with its infamous history of slavery, abuse, and murder is not as perfect a model for intolerance as Auschwitz and the Final Solution; those who want to discuss racism in the American South are at odds to do so without comparing it to Nazi Germany. As for more personal evils, mass murder, child



molestation, or murder, spousal abuse, the narrative is at odds to describe them as evil and not simply a psychological or sociological aberration—the man who beats his wife comes from a home in which his father beat his mother; his behavior is unacceptable but it is hardly Evil.

The result of this particular intensity and causality is that reference to a position as evil encourages an obligatory comparison to the tenets, figures, people, or places associated with Nazism. The destruction of humanity by radioactive fire must, of course, be called a nuclear holocaust. No other name would do it justice. As these references become more and more widespread, as they seep into different facets of American rhetoric, they must understandably succumb to the dangers posited by Baudrillard under the term hyperreal. They cease to be only references to the Nazis themselves and become references as well to references to Nazis, copies of copies.

Historically, the Nazis are defeated in 1945, but rhetorically they continue on even until today through analogy. Each incarnation of their reference has altered their definition subtly so that Nazis now can refer to totalitarian politics, a drive towards world domination racism, apathetic bureaucracy, irresponsible science, sexual deviancy, Satanism and occultism, chemical dependency, male dominance, feminist excesses, warlike attitudes, docility towards the policies of one's government, etc.. This isn't a case of adding a more accurate description (or at least, not necessarily), since these redefinitions are not validated by historical accuracy but by consistency with previous depictions.

The question of accuracy with a film like *Schindler's List*, for instance, is meaningless, since it is impossible to determine whether the measure of accuracy is

determined by actual events transpiring just as they happened or whether the accuracy is measured through the mimetic recreation of the general horror, hopelessness, and eventually mercy and gratitude associated with being Oscar Schindler or one of Schindler's Jews. How much more unreasonable a question of accuracy is for a film like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *The Rocketeer* (1991), or *Wizards* (a 1977 animated film that explores the presence of Nazism among fairy creatures of the post-apocalyptic future), and yet, sources such as these (as well as all the World War II combat films, shows like *Hogan's Heroes* and *Band of Brothers*, and any number of other sources) are what create the history of this era for the mass media—Colonel Klink is taken by the audience as indicative of what the Nazis were like (and he wasn't even originally supposed to be a Nazi<sup>75</sup>).

The psychology of the Nazi villains is a product of what the audience learns through their use in comparisons. In some ways, the Nazis Americans hate are a compilation of all manner of Nazi-like villains. They are the kind of villains that threaten us with nuclear weapons, lynch African Americans in places like Mississippi and act as petty bureaucrats who won't give us what we want because of some inane complication. The Nazi becomes an amalgamation of all these things and more, and in doing so is equally as capable of implying facile or even contradictory meanings. If the Nazi at the RMV wants a third item proving my identity before he or she will supply me with a driver's license, then the evil of Nazi atrocities is cheapened by my comparison.

For Orwell, the ubiquity and widespread availability of fascism for metaphor was dangerous enough to the impact of the very real crimes that had been committed in fascism's name, but his complaint rested chiefly on the problem of using the comparison

in political arenas. His analysis ends in that milieu, leaving the reader to suppose that fascism never became, in a significant way, a metaphor for personal trauma rather than for political argument.

As stable definitions of evil fall away, however, subsumed by the open-mindedness that Rorty associates with a liberal utopia, what remains as a stable definition must be forced into employ with greater frequency, regardless of its appropriateness. McCarthy needed Nazism to vilify communism in the middle of the Second Red Scare—this is not arbitrary or incidental. Communists alone just didn't go over well enough with the American public. Ronald Reagan attempted a similar vilification, without the Nazis, in his Evil Empire speech<sup>76</sup> and became the subject of ridicule in pop culture for his naiveté (he was accused repeatedly in punk music of being a Nazi<sup>77</sup>) just as the President as a cinematic character began, during that era, to appear as the instigator of a nuclear holocaust<sup>78</sup>.

If a definition of evil is needed, and the Nazis fill that role, then the Nazis will be, and must be, used to that purpose. The more exclusively they fill the role, the more frequently they will be employed. Historically, the metaphor became useful for describing America's wartime enemies, the nation's new enemies, domestic dissidents, the state itself by the counter culture, and American culture as Nazi-like by those who craved drastic social change. Finally, it came to be used to empower apolitical personal metaphors as well.

Historians and scholars of Holocaust awareness note that the narrative of the Holocaust in American popular consciousness, what happened and what it meant, changed with the trial of Adolf Eichmann<sup>79</sup>. They cite this moment for many reasons, but

most notably it was the first time a high ranking Nazi had taken the stand to explain, in mechanical detail, the method of genocide. Sylvia Plath, watching coverage of the trial in London, used Eichmann as a kind of muse for her poem “Daddy” which has since suffered under various kinds of criticism and controversy, mostly associated with Plath’s self identification as a victim of an overbearing father with a Jew suffering in the Holocaust. In this way, Plath became the first evidence of this new consciousness: it became unacceptable to simply associate one’s self with the victims of the Holocaust and, instead, such analogies began to imply deep seated egotism and narcissism. ‘How dare you,’ one might ask, ‘associate your suffering with theirs?’

While McCarthy could associate Jews with Nazis through a definition of totalitarianism and hunt down organizations for refugee relief as covers for communist indoctrination (and to persecute the leaders of those organizations under the complaint of anti-Semitism), the conditions of the victims within that analogy lost its plasticity with the trial of Eichmann. Jews began to take ownership of the Holocaust narrative and to extricate it from its relation to the metaphor of Nazism. They began to tell their stories, to write them down, and to end the decades of silence. As the stories become public, the metaphor of Holocaust victimhood simply became less available for non-Jews like Plath. The Nazi atrocities had come to be understood as largely motivated by racism and were no longer available for arbitrary usage.

The metaphor’s value became its ability to imply racist implications and repercussions. While Plath may have come under critique for self-identifying herself with the Jewish victims of the Nazis, leaders of black power and black nationalist movements were not only still able to evoke Hitler, the Nazis, and the death camps in the

way available to their predecessors in the civil rights movements, but their invectives against white American power structures were empowered by the metaphor and its exclusivity. Thus, the various hard felons incarcerated in California's prisons could become political prisoners held hostage in concentration camps despite their guilt in serious and violent criminal offenses.

Strangely enough, whereas Plath suffered criticism for self identifying as a suffering Jew in Dachau, no one really took much offense at her representation of her father, Otto Plath, whom she called a Nazi and compared to Hitler (Plath 57). There was little objection when Plath described her father, "With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygook./And your neat moustache/ And your Aryan eye, bright blue. Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—," despite the fact that the description makes Otto Plath appear to be a perfect stand-in for Hitler, matching his physical description with the Aryan ideals and sprinkling that description with referents to military violence (Plath 57). This double reaction suggests that one can be like Hitler without anyone being like his Jewish victims: Plath's critics didn't seem to mind that she had compared her father to Hitler except that she had become a Jew, but then, what made Hitler so horrible if it wasn't his treatment of the Jews? Hitler's infamy rested equally on his depictions within postwar culture, depictions which were, at the time Sylvia wrote "Daddy," more rooted in the totalitarian than the genocidal. Hitler not only could be a villain without reference to his Jewish victims, it was preferable that he be depicted that way for analogies to Nazism not involving racism.

The trial of Adolf Eichmann had made identification with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust taboo because it created a particular ethnic context which validated those

comparisons as appropriate or inappropriate. The subject ceased to be universal.

Thereafter, except in very specific issues involving racial oppression, one could be, and had to be, like a Nazi completely independent of a Holocaust analog. Though the Nazis still represented a definition of evil for American postwar ethics, the crimes that earned them this extreme position had become, not only unnecessary, but culturally unavailable for reference without crossing the line into political irresponsibility and extremism.

The castigation of Otto Plath without objection was demonstrative of just how liberal the appropriation of the epitaph of Nazism had become, particularly because Otto Plath hadn't really done anything wrong to invite the analogy. He neither physically or sexually abused his daughter Sylvia. The only thing he seems to have done to her offense was to mis-diagnose his own treatable disease and to die as a result, leaving her fatherless. He was bedridden for much of Sylvia's young life, and was dead by the time she was eight. Before such time as he was wholly incapacitated by his condition, he went to work as a professor of entomology to earn income for his family, returning home devastated by the strain where he spent much of the remainder of his time in bed.

Surely, the situation was less than optimal and obviously traumatic for young Sylvia, but blaming Otto Plath for the tragedy is somewhat ridiculous, and labeling him a Nazi for it is relatively unthinkable (if labeling something as a Nazi were ever unthinkable); this excess, however, failed to raise the concerns of even Plath's most unflattering critics. Plath could call her father a Nazi without raising any eyebrows because, even by the early 1960s, the comparison was rote. Severity of behavior had ceased to be a factor in deciding whether or not something deserved the degree of criticism implied by being compared to Nazism. As Nazism became the obligatory definition of evil, it grew

decreasingly exclusive and approached a condition of ubiquity—Nazism was increasingly evoked to describe any transgression or tragedy—irrespective of its intensity or nature. Otto Plath, having been presented as having done something wrong, must, by necessity, be presented as a Nazi.

This ubiquity is demonstrated in Plath's poem, "Daddy" as being consuming. What is it that "Daddy" has done, according to the poet, that makes her want, as the poem suggests in the opening of its second stanza, to kill him. Certainly, as the poem centers on the tragedy that has befallen a daughter because of her father, the poem's readers desire some resolution—some suggestion as to Daddy's crimes, but that suggestion is replaced by the image of the Nazi. Being a Nazi is presented by Plath as the only sin "Daddy" has committed. Plath begins her indictment of "Daddy" by complaining that she cannot find her heritage because of difficulties locating the place in Europe from which her family came: "But the name of the town is common./ My Polack friend/ Says there are a dozen or two." This initial tragedy is rooted in the violence inflicted upon Poland by the Nazis. First it is "scraped flat by the roller of wars, wars, wars" and then Sylvia begins her sympathetic metaphor of her being a resident of the town where she is forced to give up her native tongue and forced to speak German ("The tongue suck in my jaw/ It stuck in a barb wired snare. Ich, ich, ich, ich, I could hardly speak"). Finally, she is shipped off "like a Jew. A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen" (Plath 56). The metaphor, however, is one-sided. Sylvia, who identifies as Polish and Jewish in the metaphor, is oppressed like the Poles and the Polish Jews by the Nazis by her father because he... But there is no next step to the comparison. The Nazi image does the work of indicting "Daddy"/Otto that an actual transgression against Sylvia should have done.

That there is no transgression is immaterial. Once Plath's poem makes Otto into a Nazi, her indictment is complete. Once we accept, without evidence or reason, that Otto Plath is a Nazi, then it becomes reasonable for her to suggest that his abhorrent behavior (whatever it is) has traumatized Sylvia to repeat the trauma by marrying a model of her father who is equally abhorrent (and for the same reason: he is equally a Nazi).

Beyond the poem's artistic merit, there its implied biographical and moral evaluation of Otto Plath, and if one assumes that the poem's success depends, at least in part, on an ability for its readers to translate Plath's pain into their own, then one must assume as well that Otto Plath has stood in for other fathers whose crimes have, as well, rendered them like Nazis. In fact, Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" sets a precedent for what constitutes valid comparison to the Nazis. After all, if Otto Plath can be reasonably compared to Hitler because of his crippling and ultimately fatal illness, then who exactly can't be compared to Nazis? What sort of wrongdoing is not susceptible to comparison to ultimate evil? Otto's "crime" was involuntary and during this period, he managed to continue to work as a professor in order to support his family even though the strain of his day to day life was ultimately too much for him. Why doesn't he deserve the reader's sympathies?

But Otto Plath's castigation has been accepted. Even Plath's numerous biographers are quick to follow suit with the attitude demonstrated in "Daddy" against Otto. Even as they describe the severity of his illness, and even as they discuss Plath's problematic psychological history, her biographers still take Plath's side against her father. In Connie Ann Kirk's biography of Sylvia Plath, for instance, she describes Otto's illness as he suffered it in 1940: "Otto's symptoms increased to include insomnia, a nagging thirst that



could not be quenched, and severe leg cramps that doubled him over in pain until he grabbed his calves and called out” (20). In this same biography, in reference to the relationship between Aurelia and Otto, she writes “Before long, Otto would make even more demands on her that pushed her own dreams for herself back even further” (16). This sentence which paints Otto as an oppressive patriarchal force dashing his wife’s dreams and keeping her potential under lock and key is a reference to Otto’s falling ill; his “demands” are that his wife care for him as he is dying. Why phrase this tragedy in this way? The answer is simple. The biographer is predetermined to think of Otto in negative terms. The man is, after all, like Hitler.

The point here is not to denounce Sylvia Plath, her critics, her supporters, or her biographers. The point is to define the lower limit of necessary resemblance to the Nazis needed in order to make a comparison to Nazis. Otto Plath, fatally ill and sequestered by that illness, bears no resemblance to Hitler at all. He has committed no crimes. He shows no sign of the homicidal racism related to Nazis. He does not seem to be a conduit of banal evil (to use Arendt’s terms for the emotionless bureaucratic mechanism of killing). He was not even alive when the Nazis committed their most notorious of crimes. Aside from being speaking German, he is utterly unlike Hitler. These are all moot points. Irving Howe commented on the morally reprehensible nature of the comparison between Plath’s domestic childhood life and the Holocaust, but not on Otto and Hitler.

The logic of the indictment is not native to the poetry of Sylvia Plath. She simply followed rules of conduct that had been made available to her through her culture. If Jewish Communists, bigots in the American South, war mongers in Washington, and the

Vietcong in Southeast Asia all were vilified, at one time or another, as Nazis, then why not an absent father or an overbearing husband? The very definition of the Nazi proclivity had since its outset been described psychologically: *The Authoritarian Personality* suggested that a certain personality trait, authoritarian and dominant, was a precursor to fascism and anti-democracy. In a very real sense, Sylvia's father, if authoritarian, was associated with the Nazis according to the arguments in early attempts to define the dangers of Nazism. Plath, with "Daddy" is only unique because the poem was inspired by the particular event that changed the cultural rules for the kind of poetry she was attempting to write. "Daddy" was written at the moment when America's consciousness of the Nazis as evil changed. They remained evil without a need to reference their crimes, but their victims had become impossible to use in metaphor except in a very limited sense: the Holocaust victim/survivor had become a symbol of racism. The Nazis, in their ability to be evoked without reference to their victims, became a reference without a referent, and were to be, thereafter, primarily defined in analogy by the effect of their symbolic use.

Analogy is, unfortunately, a nearly limitless term in the Baudrillardian sense: it can come to mean anything. When culture is deduced from copies of copies, then the understanding of Nazism by American culture is itself an analogy for real Nazism. In this sense the scope of describing Nazi analogy is not simply a description of simple simile like that used by Sylvia Plath, but is, simultaneously, a commentary on all depictions of Nazism and therefore much of what we consider in our definition of evil.

Americans reading William Goldman's novel *Marathon Man* (1974) or watching its highly successful 1976 film adaptation may understand the villainy of the fictitious Dr.

Szell who, as Christopher P. Tournay points out, “is modeled on Dr. Josef Mengele, the real Nazi scientist, and is described as Mengele’s protégé, Mengele’s colleague at Auschwitz, and more brilliant than Mengele” precisely because Mengele, for the work’s audience, has the capacity to stand for the excessive cruelty of the Nazi doctors (412). Even with the horrors of Mengele, the choice to link Szell to Mengele suggests celebrity, and has the property of breeding myth and ease of reference (as it does for *Marathon Man*). It is uncertain, then, whether the audience of the work, when asked to think of the evil dentist’s mentor will think of the real Mengele, or the Mengele as he has become through popular culture. One cannot know whether a reference to Mengele refers to the male doctor of Auschwitz with his penchant for twins and medical experiments, or the myths that surround him (one of those myths being Goldman’s work) and elevates him to a stand-in for all Nazi doctors and all of their crimes.

In the Ira Levin novel, *The Boys From Brazil* (1976), for instance, Mengele masterminds the plans of the remaining Nazis in hiding. His mastery of the science of genetics has allowed him access to the science of cloning. By exercising this forbidden science, Dr. Mengele stands in for an entire army of evil mad Nazi scientists (making him a cousin to Dr. Strangelove, the Red Skull, and later, real world advocates of stem cell research) and even for mad science itself. Because of his celebrity, and its corresponding mythology, he is a quite natural cinematic attendant among the little Adolfs that he has created to further the ends of the Nazi Reich, still secretly in operation and threatening the world. Mengele is made to order for this movie. The film’s success suggests that the audience approves of the description of Mengele and the assumptions surrounding him offered by the film: Hollywood’s Mengele answers questions America has about the

Mengele of Auschwitz. The artifice of these Nazi celebrities, however, is not confined only to characters who are clearly fictional or fictionalized. In some sense, even in films like *Schindler's List* or *The Pianist* in which the narrative is founded upon eyewitness testimony rather than the presumed desires of the audience, that the Nazis one sees haven't been modified by the culture's expectations.

In *Schindler's List* (1993), the director of the camp, Amon Goeth (played by Ralph Fiennes) not only kills Jewish prisoners indiscriminately, but the film intimates that he contemplates raping a female servant named Helen. As a character in the film, Goeth is horrifying, a trait he shares with the historical figure upon which he is based: the real Goeth was, by all accounts, a monster. But was he also a rapist?

The Nazis of *Schindler's List* are representational, culled together from the various horror stories of those who survived the camps. In this way, Amon Goeth's character in the film approaches non-fiction. He is also, however, a culmination of cultural values associated with Nazism, one of which happens to be, strangely enough, the sexuality that comes with the position of dominance of the Nazis over their helpless Jewish prisoners, as well as the tendency to conflate insanity with deviant sexuality (consider, for instance, all the strange rumors that abound of Hitler's sexual practices). Susan Sontag discusses this conflation of Nazism and deviant sexuality in the last section of her essay, "Fascinating Fascism," in which she comments that the garb of sadomasochists is also the garb of the SS, chosen because it signifies a tightening of the body but also the strange relation of domination and submission associated with Nazism which can so easily turn sexual (*Under the Sign of Saturn* 99).

Did it turn sexual with the real Goeth, or is that an implication of the film that was allowed to slip in because it fits the mold of what a Nazi ought to be? Are Goeth's feelings towards his servant historical or cinematic? And how is an audience member supposed to tell the difference from one to the other? If Goeth hadn't raped female Jewish prisoners, he would have been more than capable of the act in the imaginations of anyone viewing *Schindler's List*...because he is evil, and because evil rapes. Spielberg, in his depiction, stops Goeth after the implication of the possibility.

*The Pianist* offers a similar problem with the character of the German officer who, near the end of the film, finds Szpielman hiding in an abandoned building that is to be turned into a German military headquarters. In a scene which suggests that the German officer Hosenfeld has become jaded by the pain and suffering caused by his people against the Jews, he atones for his nation's crimes by hiding, feeding and clothing Szpielman until the Russian army can come to his rescue. The film presents this conversion as a product of a closing defeat that finally allows the German officer to act humanely. What it neglects to point out is that the historical Hosenfeld had rescued numerous Jews from certain death before running into Szpielman. According to Richard J. Evans, "Another rescuer, the Catholic German Army officer and former schoolteacher, Wilm Hosenfeld, also began employing Poles and Jews in army sports administration to protect them from arrest" (557). Many of the Jews he rescued wrote letters on his behalf to the Russia where Hosenfeld spent his last years as a prisoner of war. His experience with Szpielman wasn't unique, nor was it the result of conversion, but to have depicted Hosenfeld accurately would have complicated the image of the Nazi.

Interestingly, if the Nazis have become imminently available for comparison, The subject of their victims has become sacred. Even questioning the validity of films like *Schindler's List* or *The Pianist* is tantamount to broaching the line crossed, in the opinion of some of her critics, by Sylvia Plath. *Schindler's List* is the cinematic account of Oscar Schindler and the Jews whom he saved from extermination at the hands of Goeth. Its drama is produced through survivor testimony and as such is taken as factual. It is not a documentary, but it does attempt to present an account that approaches non-fiction. As such, the film becomes part of the story of the meaning of the Holocaust for its viewers, and in this way, acts as a history lesson for the most tragic event of the twentieth century, a character sketch of the Nazis and a validation for conceptualizing Nazism as evil's epitome. It is to be watched reverently.

Commenting on the *Seinfeld* episode "Raincoats," in which Jerry Seinfeld is caught kissing during a screening of *Schindler's List*, actor Jerry Stiller offered in an on-location interview: "The storyline I felt was really over the top and I almost wanted to say to everybody, 'you can't have them necking in the balcony while they're watching *Schindler's List*.' I just felt that they had gone over the line with that one and then I said, well, Jews go over the line." (*Seinfeld*, Season 5: Commentary)

Stiller's commentary is interesting because it notes two specific reactions to the Holocaust, both of which are directly challenged through the comedy of the show. First, that there is a line of sacredness and that *Schindler's List* is over that line because of the material it treats and the manner in which it treats it. Second, that the ability to access the sacred is available and acceptable exclusively for Jews. Stiller's response to *Schindler's List* as comedic material, his reservations as well as his assent anchored in ethnicity,

reveals assumptions about the Holocaust as a text. In particular, his attitude, and attitudes like it, suggest that the sacredness of the Holocaust, are the property of the Jews whose collective trauma is to be popularly understood as qualification for assigning them the role of gatekeeper against misuse of the Holocaust—especially against its use as symbolic, rather than historic, value.

Responsibility for access to the Holocaust is assumed to be a function of suffering and the reverence that results from that suffering: Jews will guard against poetry after Auschwitz becoming, in the words of Theodore Adorno, “barbaric,” or at least poetry that attempts to use the Holocaust as a symbol. After all, it belittles the value of the Holocaust when someone’s childhood under a dictatorial father is described as an event like the Holocaust. The most telling critique of this trend is Mel Brooks’s film and Broadway play *The Producers* (1968) in which the character Max Bialystock assumes that a play which makes comedy out of Hitler (*Springtime for Hitler*) will be in such poor taste that it will offend its audience and flop at the box office. Part of the comedy of *The Producers* is that Bialystock is, of course, wrong. The play is a smash hit precisely because of the Jewish character Bialystock and his own ethnically attained power over the Holocaust and his transference of that power to non-Jews through comedy<sup>80</sup>.

Bialystock’s plan depends on his failure to comprehend the power that he, as a Jew, holds over interpreting the tenor of the Holocaust. In the end, he can not only utilize that power, he can also give it away—allowing, for the span of the play, his audience to laugh.

Of course, what the audience in *The Producers* really laughs at is not the Holocaust itself, or that the subject of the genocide has been stripped by Bialystock of its

sacredness, but the absurdity of the Nazi. Even in another, later Mel Brooks film, *To Be or Not to Be* (1983), in which the audience is invited to laugh at both the Jewish theater company and the Nazis, they are not invited to laugh at the consequences should the Jewish theater company be discovered by the Nazis. In a scene particularly out of place for the film's comedy, an escaping old Jewish woman dressed as a clown freezes as she realizes she's surrounded by Nazis and risking the cover under which the rest of the Polish Jews are making their escape. As she freezes, the comedy of the situation is interrupted and changed to horror.

If the Nazis discover that she's actually an escaping Jew, she and her compatriots will be caught and murdered. Brooks does not make light of this horror. He allows it, and surrounded by comedy, it is amplified. When the woman is finally rescued, it is by a clown assuming the role of the Gestapo, he slaps a fake yellow star on her and pretends to arrest her. Of course, Brooks's version of *To Be or Not To Be* is a remake of the 1942 version starring Carole Lombard and Jack Benny. The original film crossed too many lines to enjoy the success of its remake. The Nazis, in 1942, were not to be made the subject of comedy, and the movie made many in its audience uncomfortable.

When the remake was released some forty years later, there were few such objections. In a 1983 review of Mel Brooks's version of the film, Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* begins his review by offering, "Everybody can relax. Mel Brooks's remake of Ernst Lubitsch's 1942 classic, "To Be or Not to Be," is smashingly funny." His opening signals the kind of awkwardness that surrounded the comedy of the original film. The war decades over by the time Brooks releases his version, that awkwardness is gone and the film can be judged on its own merits. Near the close of the review, Canby writes,



“when the Lubitsch film was released in March 1942, the terrible realities of World War II and the death of Miss Lombard made it difficult for audiences as well as critics to respond to the film's brilliant comedy. I hope that nothing will come between today's audiences and this exuberant delight.”

The scene of the escaping clowns in *To Be or Not to Be*, full of both dramatic and comedic pathos, is typical of the way the Holocaust works out in representation: the horror of the victims remains sacred, but there is no such sacredness for depictions of the Nazis (who would stand up for them in protest and who would take such protests seriously?) whom the film depicts as buffoons. In like manner, Szpielman's story in *The Pianist* must be portrayed with due reverence, but Hosenfeld, his Nazi rescuer, is modifiable. The stories told by the Jews saved by Oscar Schindler are carefully depicted as accurately as possible, but Amon Goeth is modified so as to seem worse than his already horrible historic counterpart.

The comedy of *Seinfeld* and Jerry's kiss in the balcony at a screening of *Schindler's List* seems to fly in the face of this model. Jerry is not giving the Holocaust the reverence it is due, but then the scene isn't really a commentary on the sacredness of the Holocaust, but on the sacredness which American culture awards the film *Schindler's List*. It is only irreverent if the film *Schindler's List* is inseparable from the Holocaust it represents (so that a slight on the film would then be a slight on the sacredness of the Holocaust), but the *Seinfeld* scene is equally a commentary on news reports of African American high school students in Oakland, California who were thrown out of the Grandlakes Theater for laughing during *Schindler's List*—an act so unspeakable that it sparked critiques of the African American community and the youth of that day.

In his response to the media outrage of Americans, Kevin Weston wrote, in a 1994 article for the *Los Angeles Times*, that the students were laughing, not at the horror of the Holocaust, but at the undue reverence the movie was meant to invoke in African American students who had been oppressed by America's white dominated society for hundreds of years. He asks and then answers the question:

How could anyone laugh at the extermination of the Jews and other minorities by the Nazis all over Europe? Answer: They were laughing not at the Holocaust but at the movie. The truth is, few African Americans go to the movies--even "serious" movies like "Schindler's List"--expecting a \$7 epiphany. We're used to distancing ourselves from what we see on the screen, not identifying with it. We're used to laughing. How else can we deal with the absurdly degrading portraits of ourselves we see on the screen--or with our total invisibility? ("Why Would Anyone Laugh at 'Schindler's List'?")

The showing of the film, a school fieldtrip on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, was meant to remind the students of the problems of racism in their own country. Thus, the reaction to *Schindler's List*, its meaning, and even its sacredness, is contextualized. Were the students laughing at the Holocaust, the reverence assigned the Holocaust, the reverence assigned the Holocaust by a movie that went out of its way to attain that reverence, or were they laughing because they were kids who have become so jaded by violence that they could no longer see it as real? And of course, the issue of how much the Holocaust acts as a metaphor for racism everywhere, or whether its sacredness, by the time of the release of *Schindler's List*, had made the subject of the Holocaust no longer available to anyone (whether they be African American teens from economically depressed Oakland, California or famous poets like Sylvia Plath).

The incident at the Grandlakes Theater has become part of the mythology surrounding *Schindler's List*, just as *Schindler's List* becomes part of the mythology surrounding the Holocaust, but what remains uncertain is whether these mythologies

transfer such that the incident at the Grand Lake Theater is now a part of the myths that surround the Holocaust (in Beaudrillardian terms, this questions whether a modification of a copy modifies also its original model). If not, then Jerry Seinfeld's kiss in the balcony during *Schindler's List* is a commentary on *Schindler's List* only. He is not using the Holocaust as comedic material—only *Schindler's List* by questioning its sacredness, and the sacredness afforded it. Otherwise, the reaction of the teenagers at the Grand Lake Theater bears no relation to the film they watched, but only to the Holocaust itself—but then, Seinfeld too becomes a commentary not only on *Schindler's List*, but the Holocaust as well.

Is *Schindler's List* part of the sacredness of the Holocaust, or part of the iconography that surrounds that sacredness? Is it a metaphor for racism, or is it just a movie? If it is just a movie, can the Holocaust still be evoked to talk about racism, and if so, what happens when those who are oppressed by their race fail to associate themselves with Europe's Jews or feel that their own suffering is undermined by comparison to the trauma suffered at the hands of the Nazis? Is America's African American population justified in assuming that though their situation is not as bad as Bergen-Belsen, it is still bad enough to require address? Were the Oakland students taken to *Schindler's List* to be shown the dangers of racism (as if they had no idea), or were they taken there to learn that things could be worse? The confusion of these symbolic meanings is native to the growing complexity of the Nazi metaphor as it becomes increasingly derived from popular media and divorced from its historical meaning through the sacredness and exclusivity of the metaphor of the Holocaust. Its confusion is evident even to the actors in Seinfeld as they discussed and filmed the make-out scene in the balcony at *Schindler's*

*List*. Jerry Stiller felt that the subject of the comedy was sacred; Larry David, co-writer for the episode, felt that the comedy centered on the assumed sacredness of *Schindler's List* only—in an interview, he likened the subject of the scene to wanting to touch his wife's breast during Synagogue (*Seinfeld*, Season 5: Commentary).

Later in the episode, when actor Judd Hirsch, playing Elaine's close talking paramour Aaron, bemoans how much more attention he could have given Jerry's parents during their stay in New York, the scene is a drawn out melodrama of Oscar Schindler's final speech in *Schindler's List*.

Aaron: I could have done more. I could have done so much more.

Elaine: You did enough

Aaron: No. I could have called the travel agency, got them on another flight to Paris. I could have got them out.

Jerry: You tried Aaron. It was too expensive.

Aaron: This watch. This watch could have paid for their whole trip. This ring. This ring is one more dinner I could have taken them out to. Water, they need some water.

Elaine: Why?

Elaine's question is evocative of problems with Aaron's relation to *Schindler's List* in general. Aaron hasn't been a part of the Schindler's List/make-out plotline. Instead, he has been escorting Jerry's parents around New York for reasons that no one can quite comprehend. When they leave and he mimics the speech given by Liam Neeson as Oscar Schindler it makes Aaron into a Schindler stand-in, the Seinfelds into the Schindler Jews, and their visit to New York becomes akin to surviving Nazi occupation in Poland, but as Aaron isn't involved in the particular sub-plot driven by the sacredness of *Schindler's List*, the scene becomes non-sequitur.

What it means that Aaron is like Oscar Schindler is entirely unclear. Is Seinfeld trying to make light of Schindler's rescue of the Jews working in his factory (and is he

making light of the film *Schindler* or the real Schindler)? Is he, ultimately, saying that Aaron, because he's helping out a Jewish couple, thinks that he's Oscar Schindler? Or, and this seems more likely, is the *Seinfeld* episode still just poking fun at how seriously everyone takes *Schindler's List* without really considering the message that Aaron's speech creates, as if to say, "so what if the character belittles Oscar Schindler? What does it really matter anyway?"

*Seinfeld's* choice of *Schindler's List* as the subject for the show's attack on sacredness is not, however, as arbitrary as the final scene with Aaron would suggest. *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* represent Nazism (and the assumptions about their representations of Nazism) at an extreme in terms of the responsibility one expects from the film makers (and authors, as well) concerning accuracy. Such mass cultural products concerning the Holocaust have a need to bear witness to the suffering of European Jews, to essentially tell it like it was—and while this responsibility seems to be present in describing the suffering of the victims in works that have taken on a kind of sacredness in American Culture, their effect is not above some cajoling precisely because their medium requires a double reaction. *Seinfeld* and the Oakland students at the Grand Lakes Theater are laughing not at the Holocaust, but at its filmic version, but it's hard to mark the difference, and so Aaron seems irreverent and the teenagers seem callous. Despite these films' focus on horrible scenes of brutality, indifference, torture, and murder, their need for accuracy impedes the works' attempts to portray the Nazis as evil enough. Liberties with the depiction of Nazis are taken so as to make the evil Nazi more evil than even their real crimes would suggest<sup>81</sup>. In the name of salvation, these liberties are taken so as to limit the Nazi's recovery of humanity only to specific redemptory moments so as to

imply on-the-spot conversion rather than a hidden and constant desire to subvert the genocidal racism of their kinsmen.

If the goal of these works is accuracy, then these liberties are out of place and must be explained, but interestingly enough, explanations do not readily present themselves. Why should the evil of the Nazis need to be exaggerated at all? If, for instance, it is assumed that the Nazis in these films are exaggerated as an attack on Nazi sadism by immortalizing an exaggerated version of it in film, then an irresolvable dilemma is evoked. Such exaggerations include the Nazi commander from *The Pianist* who, in reality, has earned a place in Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial to the righteous gentiles. Adding fictional crimes to the real crimes of Nazi monsters like Amon Goeth risks fictionalizing the suffering caused by the monsters even though it is precisely accuracy in depictions of this suffering that define the aesthetic philosophy of these films and earns their sacred position in American culture. Obviously anyone attempting to depict Nazis is expected to make them as bad as possible, but to make them as bad as possible within the limits of history is to accentuate the suffering caused by the Holocaust; making them as bad as our imaginations will allow undermines the historical realism of the victimization and in cases like *Schindler's List* changes also what is taken as history. Amon Goeth should be immortalized as a sadistic madman who fed people to his dogs, shot the helpless, and murdered children in cold blood: that's who he was. Remembering him as a failed rapist complicates the revelation of his crimes and diminishes their effect, even if it makes him a better fit for American culture's Puritanical sense of what it means to be evil: not only homicidal but sex-crazed and violent towards women.

Moreover, as filmic versions of the Nazis are fictions, in the strictest sense, they open the filmic Holocaust up to criticism. Aaron in the *Seinfeld* episode is a satirical look at the character of Oscar Schindler in *Schindler's List*—if he were anything more, his laments about his watch and his ring would be in incredibly poor taste. But Aaron as Schindler doesn't make the audience uncomfortable at all—he's just parodying a movie. He doesn't tread on the sacredness of the event itself.

This does not, however, explain away the complicated nature of filmic Holocaust to its historical counterpart. *Schindler's List* can be mocked as a representation of the Holocaust even though its goal is accuracy, but part of the reason that it can be mocked at all is precisely on the point of inaccuracy to which the filmic version must succumb because they must include Nazis and because the definition of Nazism upon which they must rely is fluid. As the exaggeration of the Nazis' evil is counterproductive to the aesthetic and ethical aims of works that attempt frank depictions of the Holocaust, their exaggerated as embodiments of evil must be the result of cultural obligation. It simply does not do, according to cultural expectations of what Nazis are, to depict a Nazi as having women slaves and have him not be tempted to rape them. It does not work that a Nazi commander should have used his position to secretly help political prisoners and Jews throughout the war escape persecution and murder. It would not fit what American culture has come to expect of evil and therefore must expect of Nazis. Evil has become hyperreal, and has become confused with its model: the Nazis. The relationship is reciprocal: just as the Nazis take on all the connotations of evil, Evil takes on all the connotations of Nazism. Is it any wonder, then, that Nazism has been attached to such disparate social and personal problems as sadomasochistic tendencies, type A

personalities, spousal abuse, petty bureaucrats, methamphetamine, abortion, AIDS, and Satanism? If these things are evil, then they must be relatable to Nazism, or else they are not evil.

This trend extends to, and is, indeed, better represented, in texts which have no particular responsibility to describe the atrocities accurately (such as political statements or propaganda). When protesters against the war in Iraq called George W. Bush a Nazi, they meant that he was *like* a Nazi in some way, that he shared characteristics of a Nazi in the minds of the protesters—not that he was actually a member of the Nazi party sworn to secure the supremacy of the Aryan race. Accuracy had no real stake in their statement and so use of a model for evil, exaggeration, conflation, and false similarities were to be expected. On the other hand, *Schindler's List* is sacred: when people laugh during the movie, it makes national news, and in such a venue, it is unexpected that Nazis should become mass cultural versions of themselves.

Moreover, if Americans model evil after their assumptions about Nazism, then *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* are cultural sites where that model is supposed to be created. When someone is compared to Nazis, they are, in a sense, being compared to the Nazis they know. For many people, those Nazis come from *Schindler's List*. If the Nazis in *Schindler's List* are, themselves, models, then models begin to be built on models. Accuracy, as derived through a comparison to an original increasingly loses its power as a criterion for confirmation as the model produces greater instances for its own usage. Eventually liberal usage leads to universalization which, having already exempted accuracy as a criterion for confirmation, discards also the propriety of context. As comparisons to Nazism begin to be acceptable without need for appropriateness, they



become, finally, obligatory. The thing being confirmed through these hyperreal models is American culture's definition of evil. In other words, the definition of evil is created through models of an epitome, Nazism, which is based on sources like *Schindler's List* which is, in turn, constructed through models based on the culture's definition of evil. The modeling is recursive, self-perpetuating, and moves steadily away from historical connotations.

Ironically, the Nazis are picked for this function because their definition is assumed to be stable: their evil is inherent. What the example of films like *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* clearly indicate, however, is that the definition is far from stable. It can be made to mean whatever it needs to mean so long as it doesn't include identification with victims in the Holocaust: this is the only context in which the analogy is inappropriate. In fact, *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* are revisions of earlier models of the Nazi atrocities which did not emphasize the Jewish ethnicity of the victims. The result of this transitive definition is that evil, based on these shifting values of Nazism, has come to have no inherent meaning at all. It only inherits and supplements meanings that are already part of the model. Evidence of this amorphousness can be seen in works that attempt at, and are judged in relation to, historical accuracy where one expects the approach of non-fiction to stifle ad hoc definitions of evil. It is even more prevalent in works that have no stake in portraying the Holocaust at all.

In the NBC show *Chuck* [2007-2010], for instance, the title character falls in with a young genius named Lazslo who has escaped from his secret government prison in an episode titled, "Chuck Versus The Sandworm" (aired October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007). The show *Chuck* centers around the somewhat comical escapades of a futureless late twenties

computer expert who accidentally has all of America's espionage information downloaded into his brain, forcing him into the life of a spy. After Chuck and Laszlo watch the James Bond movie, *A View to a Kill*, the two characters begin to discuss the Bond film. Chuck comments that Max Zorn, the Bond villain, is "the best bad guy ever." Laszlo disagrees because he doesn't think that Zorn is a bad guy at all. According to Laszlo, who has been kept underground all his life in service to the state, "The Nazis used Zorn for his superior gifts, the way our government uses me and you." In the Bond film, Zorn is the result of a Nazi experiment in breeding super-geniuses who, after World War II, began to work with communist Russia. Laszlo identifies with Zorn as a victim of the Nazis and in doing so makes the obvious analogy: the United States Government is acting like Nazis in their treatment of Laszlo.

In the background of the discussion between the two characters, the viewer can't help but see the very serious issue of political prisoners, topical at the time of the show's premier. Obviously, Laszlo's having been imprisoned for reasons of national security is reminiscent of the captives incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay or in secret jails like Abu Ghraib. Laszlo is, in fact, an extreme example of this kind of imprisonment. The character of Laszlo acts as a criticism of the U.S. government and its then current policy of suspending *habeas corpus* in order to imprison terror-suspects for reasons of national security. Laszlo validates his critique against this practice, not by citing his own hardships, but by evoking Nazism. Now, the real world United States government is acting like Nazis because of the way it treats prisoners of Abu Ghraib and the parallel the viewer can make to Laszlo, who is drawing a parallel between himself and Max Zorn as victims of Nazism.

Strangely enough, the ethical rhetoric of *Chuck*, concerning Laszlo as a political prisoner (and a stand in for detainees at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib) is mirrored exactly in the real world rhetoric concerning these same issues. In the opening paragraph, of Alexander Cockburn's column in *The Nation* titled "Green Lights for Torture," (2004) Cockburn makes a direct reference to Nazi Germany as the precursor to the torture tactics used by the U.S. Government. The reference occurs as a descriptive clause in his statement: "the long and copiously documented record of U.S. torture, with many of its refinements acquired by the CIA from the Nazis after World War II" (9). He goes on to describe prisoners being sodomized by flashlights, kept awake all night in cells, led around on dog leashes, having their genitals threatened by dogs, and executed. Is it really necessary to know that this is reminiscent of Nazi Germany in order for the public to appreciate that such torture is wrong? The reference to Nazism implies that these acts lack the proper ethical value in their own context.

In a 2004 article published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* concerning the propensity for doctors in places like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay to become desensitized to suffering, Robert Jay Lifton drops out of the topical issue of U.S. torture to discuss the socialization of Nazi doctors: "The Nazis provided the most extreme example of doctors' becoming socialized to atrocity," and continues a description of this process in detail; in a 13 paragraph article about the involvement of doctors in U.S. military torture, he devotes 2 entire paragraphs to doctors in Nazi Germany. Had the U.S. doctors become acclimated to the pain of the tortured terror suspects would it not have carried enough moral weight all on its own?

In the *USA Today*'s coverage of the 2004 D-Day anniversary, the Abu Ghraib/Nazi torture comparison is present in reverse. In a discussion of France's feelings towards commemorating their American liberators, the interviewer, Knox Noelle, asks Jaques Marcellin, "a French Jew who spent three years hiding from the *Nazis* in the South of France," what he thinks about the Iraq war and about Abu Graib in particular (08a). Clearly, the juxtaposition of Abu Ghraib with Nazi Germany in this interviewer is suggesting the question: are the Americans acting like Nazis in Iraq? The emphasis is again put, not on the torture or injustice then being perpetrated but on the degree to which America's attitudes in its prisons for terror suspects resemble those of the Nazis in running their death camps.

In the July 2005 edition of *Washington Monthly*'s jargon watch, the staff writer reminds us "once again of what should be a hard and fast rule of politics: Nazi/Hitler comparisons—while always tempting—are never a good idea" (11). He then goes on to quote a number of politician's statements (and the length of time to their retractions) concerning political comparisons between various issues and Nazi Germany (one of which is, of course, the offenses at Guantanamo). The writer here is right and wrong: comparisons to Nazi Germany probably should be off limits, but as they are one of the few definitions America has for evil, they have come into use with greater frequency and less responsibility. He echoes Godwin's Law of Nazi analogies by speaking to their appropriateness, but misses their inevitability and ubiquity.

In *Chuck*, Laszlo's identification of himself as being like a victim of Nazi Germany (but not a victim of the Holocaust itself) was made on national television, on NBC at 8 o'clock. *Chuck* is followed by the NBC hit *Heroes*<sup>82</sup>. Millions of people watched this

particular episode, saw Laszlo, and either made the correlation themselves or were told the correlation by Laszlo: the U.S. Government, in locking people up for reasons of national security, is essentially acting like the Nazis. Yet, even in the highly public arena of national primetime television, the comparison failed to stir a reaction. What commentary there is concerning the episode centers on the shows two female stars scantily clad in their Halloween costumes and is mostly located within the public forums of Internet posting boards. Otherwise, the comparison simply passed by without much of a stir.

And of course, if it had any chance of causing a stir, NBC would never have aired the episode. Chuck and Laszlo's conversation is not NBC's attempt at a kind of back handed critique of U.S. foreign policy. *Chuck* clearly isn't supposed to be controversial. Moreover, *Chuck* isn't controversial...even when it implies that the U.S. government is acting in the same manner as Nazis. The implication is, of course, that if such a comparison, mass produced and distributed, isn't controversial then such a comparison, itself, simply isn't controversial by its very nature.

But if comparing the U.S. government to Nazi Germany isn't meant to instigate controversy, then why make the comparison at all? As with *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist*, the specific function of Nazism as a model is not to exaggerate meaning, but rather is meant to appeal to Nazism as a method for creating ethical meaning. For the character Chuck, it forces him to realize that Laszlo's situation isn't just unfortunate—that this isn't just another issue where there are multiple sides and no one is truly right or wrong. By evoking Nazis, Laszlo is forcing Chuck to see the U.S. Government as

essentially evil: it is not a thing that does evil (and might do otherwise) but a thing that is evil in everything it does no matter what it does.

Chuck is, himself, both a servant and captive of this government that is now being compared to Nazi Germany. One of the show's recurring problems is that Chuck must give up his normal life, including romantic involvement, so as to be at the beckon call of the information he houses. When Laszlo compares his situation to that of Zorn, he is also comparing Chuck's situation by saying that the control the government holds over Chuck's life is another sign of the U.S. Government's resemblance to the Nazis: the Nazis control sex, as they do with Amon Goeth and as they do through the breeding experiments that result in Max Zorn. The constant surveillance too, becomes subject to the Nazi analogy so that the numerous surveillance devices that surround Chuck in his personal life, hearken back to the Patriot Act which also becomes implicated as Nazi-esque by Laszlo's association.

This shift in understanding of the government and the control it exerts over private lives is indicative of the way a comparison to Nazism immediately shifts a discourse from one in which meaning is derived from context to one in which meaning is essentially and inherently part of something's nature. Before the comparison to Zorn, Laszlo's plight is unfortunate, but its tragedy, as well as its political implications, depended on the values used in its consideration. If one values national security, for instance, over the rights of the individual, then Laszlo's plight is sad, but ultimately necessary for the good of the country. If one values personal freedom over national security then of course Laszlo's plight is extraordinarily tragic and reason for political disillusionment. In the end though, what is there to indicate which side of this argument, which viewpoint, is ultimately

correct? There is no position beyond the context dependent rhetoric where conflict between the rhetorical systems can be decided: no meta-context. An appeal outside this ethical system is necessary to judge its ethics: a noncircular theoretical backup, according to Rorty<sup>83</sup>.

If we re-examine Zorn for a moment we see the problem further elucidated. Zorn is attempting to destroy California and to kill millions of people for money. Is he evil? Is he a victim? Even with a crime this dastardly, it is not possible to simply levy ethical judgment on him. His guilt is up for debate; in fact, it causes the debate between Laszlo and Chuck within the framework of the episode. Unless his actions can be compared to the Nazis', there is always the possibility of some context that will explain or even exonerate him (such as his having been the victim of a Nazi experiment). Liberal irony cannot answer this question; even a well trained moral intuition will fail as it has no basis.

The ethical evaluation is not dependent on whether or not wrong has actually been done. Imprisoning Laszlo is not inherently evil in a morally relative ethical system such as one in which context is key, nor is Chuck's enforced celibacy, nor is Zorn's dropping California into the ocean. These actions may be bad, but we cannot condemn them unequivocally without a comparison to Nazism—that's precisely why the comparison to Nazism is made. Otherwise, we are simply commenting on the action and its relation to a context.

To complicate this matter further, the entire discussion between Chuck and Laszlo is based on a comparison to a Bond villain and his fictional Nazi history. The ethics of Guantanamo and invasions of privacy are not compared to a real victim of the Nazi or

even to real Nazis. The Nazis that make the fictional Zorn are as fictional as Zorn. The U.S. Government's treatment of Laszlo and Chuck is compared to how a fictional Nazi Germany treats a fictional human being.

Yet, despite the fictional nature of the Bond Nazis, the fictional Nazis are as functional as real Nazis in terms of comparison. What it means to be like fictional Nazis is already understood throughout mass culture and accepted as having a kind of validity. The show's writers didn't feel it necessary to have Laszlo explain this extraordinarily complex relationship. The American audience, inundated from having heard it hundreds of times before, already gets it. But if the fake Nazis aren't comparable to real Nazis then the fictional Nazis inherit the evil of the real Nazis only because of their name. They are never shown so that the viewer might see any other resemblance; the audience experiences Zorn's Nazi past secondhand. These Nazis might be anything. In the movie *Hellboy* (2004), for instance, Nazis are Satanists. In *The Boys From Brazil* (1976), the Nazis are masters of genetic super science. In *Apt Pupil*, (1982) Nazis live next door and are trying to forget their pasts but are addicted to the smell of burning flesh. In *Captain America*, Nazis fight superheroes. In *To Be Or Not To Be* (1942 and 1983), Nazis are clowns. In *Hogan's Heroes* (1965-1971), they are incompetent buffoons. In *Star Trek* (1968), they're aliens<sup>84</sup>. In *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), they are just there to be slaughtered. In *X-Men*, they persecute mutants. The fictional Nazi has many faces; which one is like the U.S. Government in this comparison? Yet, even faceless, Laszlo's Nazis force the ethical dilemma. Even the presence of Nazis in name only elevates the force of the ethical argument beyond context; being like fictional Nazis is as bad as being like real ones.



Pausing briefly to put a face on the Nazis in the Bond movie, we see that there is little to help determine their character (they are only mentioned secondhand). The narrative of *A View to a Kill* assumes that the audience will know enough about Nazi Germany to know that, even defeated, it is still capable of propagating its evils. The world can only wait for the repercussions of Nazi Germany to pop up from time to time with the same vile nature as their progenitors, the Nazis themselves. Max Zorn's relationship to Nazi Germany is that of a time bomb ready to detonate on the enemies of a dead saboteur. Even without a single scene depicting Nazi Germany, *A View to a Kill* establishes this message: we are not yet done with the Nazis. The propagation of the Nazi throughout mass culture reinforces this message.

The movie creates another message about the fiction of its Nazis. Nazi Germany never perfected genetic science to such a point that they could create super geniuses like Zorn. He is a fiction. This particular breed of super-science is chosen because it is in keeping with a view of the Nazis as having a vested interest in the science of reproduction (as with Mengele and *Dr. Strangelove*). The notion of superior and inferior races, the Nazi policies of eugenics and genocide, and the Nazis' concentration on physical genetic characteristics as markers for self worth all point to an ideology that is obsessed with breeding. Zorn's Nazis are like the comic book versions of their historic counterparts.

While there are real historical reasons for this viewpoint, its vision in mass culture is only loosely motivated by those notions. The view of Nazi science has become bastardized in mass culture into the twin notions of the Nazi as super-scientist (particularly in the realm of genetics) and the Nazi as sexual deviant. Consider, for

instance, the reasons Chuck gives for staying to watch *A View to a Kill*; it includes Max Zorn but also Grace Jones as a “sex assassin;” the sexual aura of the Nazis is implicit in its henchwomen. The Nazi government itself becomes, in this movie, the polluted womb that produces Zorn, marking it both as a corrupted mother and also as emblematic of science’s mastery over nature.

Finally, after all the viewer’s sympathies have been engaged, and the show has offered a scathing critique of the U.S. government, Laszlo reveals himself to be dangerous which reverses all of the audience’s earlier suppositions. Laszlo’s psychosis leaves the audience in no position to feel sympathy for him, and his use of the Nazi as a mode of comparison makes little rhetorical sense as a commentary on U.S. Domestic policy. The comparison he has made between himself and the victims of Nazi Germany (Zorn at least) seems morally irresponsible. The message of the show switches from a critique of the government for embracing fascist action through indefinite incarceration and becomes an endorsement of fascist attitudes under the rallying cry of national security so long as the national security targets only Nazi-esque figures like Laszlo. This seems the most likely meaning, but even this moral is a bit unclear. Perhaps the point is that Laszlo’s situation (and the situations of others like him) isn’t so bad; it isn’t, after all, the Holocaust.

Of course, the show is not attempting to vindicate fascism, even in part. Its inability to hold to the moral position that it forces is more of a symptom of some other attitude towards Nazism that is prevalent throughout American Culture. The Nazi is evoked because it is a stable position of absolute and unassailable evil, but having been repeatedly summoned into these comparisons within the milieu of mass culture over and

over again, the Nazi too, now suffers from the context dependency to which it was believed immune and its ubiquity ultimately drains it of the rhetorical power that was the initial reason for its evocation. The image of Nazism is recurrent precisely because it is always evil, but having been pulled into cultural arguments in too many guises, it is now unclear whether the image of Nazism, and evil itself, always means the same thing.

If we look again to *Chuck* as an example of mass American culture's reaction to Nazi analogies the problem becomes abundantly clear. What do the terms good and evil mean inside the narrative of *Chuck*? The government has locked up a young and innocent man against his will and held him that way for a decade. How can this situation be seen as anything but evil, but when Laszlo mismanages a comparison to Nazism, suddenly the acts against him are robbed of all their villainy: suddenly Laszlo is the villain and not worth our sympathy. Clearly Max Zorn is a villain (he wants to drop the West coast into the ocean). However, because the Nazis are evoked as the creators of Zorn, it is not clear whether his condition as either a villain or a victim is above debate. In short, as Nazism becomes unfixed and loose as an ethical signifier, so too must the entire ethical system fall into ambiguity if it depends upon the value of Nazism as evil for its stability.

Unfortunately, that lack of fixity denies analysis. If Nazis represent a meta-ethical feature above context dependent ethics, then one must imagine a meta-meta-ethical structure with which to judge the corruption of the meta-ethical: if we judge context dependent situations good or evil based on an appeal to Nazism, then how do we judge the ethics of Nazism's transformation into a context dependent situation? In works of popular culture, the morality may have deviated completely from any sort of recognizable

ethical framework, but then, how can a critique of that shift be made given that the entire ethical structure in general has become universally unrecognizable?

In terms of the show's narrative cohesion, Laszlo is the villain. The characters react to him as a villain. He tries to destroy California. He tries to kill Chuck. The good guys finally defeat him. The assumption is clearly that the viewer is supposed to see Laszlo as the bad guy and his defeat at the show's conclusion is supposed to be viewed as a moral victory. There is no way to prevent that narrative conclusion (nor reason to see why prevention might be necessary). There is no way to see the appeal to Nazism and take it seriously so as to re-establish the ethics of the show as they perhaps ought to be—to see both Laszlo and Chuck as victims of Nazism. Good and Evil are established within the show, by the show, and only for the show so that general rules governing good and evil are ultimately lost (they don't even survive inside the show's sixty minute time frame). Chuck and Laszlo still suffer under a situation with obvious similarities with Nazism (fictional Nazis though they may be) but it is no longer important. Some other context now decides the morality for the moment and the show goes on. Morality ever shifts within American mass culture as well.

Outside of the show's narrative framework, there is no way to determine how the audience is supposed to understand Laszlo, the political prisoners he represents, the government that locked him away, the government that keeps Chuck and its citizenry under constant surveillance, the Patriot Act that is so obviously hinted at by the invasions of Chuck's privacy, etc.. In the end, Laszlo is revealed as having a bi-polar condition. Even he isn't evil, just sick.

As a nearly ubiquitous term for defining morality, the breakdown of ethics implied by Nazi analogy is not simply confined to *Chuck*. Without an appeal to a stable position, an ethical system simply isn't possible. What is evil in one case is not evil in the next—there are no rules that universally apply. *Chuck* reveals this conundrum in the sort of blatant moralizing one expects from prime time television, but the problem persists in all milieus of mass culture where ethical evaluation is needed. Failure is total in such endeavors because success depends on a stable position which the context dependent ideology itself has destabilized.

This plight is perhaps best represented by satires which attack America's use of Nazism for establishing a definition of evil. In *White Noise* (1985) for instance, Don DeLillo relates the downfall of American values through the main character Jack Gladney, a professor and head of the Hitler Studies department in the fictional College on the Hill. DeLillo leaves the subject of Hitler, as it is related by Gladney and his narrative, as an open ended designation so amorphously defined that it remains unclear as to what the study of Nazism might mean. The novel presents no moral reasons as to why the main character has gravitated towards Hitler or what it is he, as an expert, teaches about Hitler, except that Gladney is enlarged by his relation to Hitler's notoriety. In his explanation concerning how he first approached a career of studying Hitler, Jack explains the advice given to him by his, then, chancellor:

He strongly suggested I gain weight. He wanted me to "grow out" into Hitler...I had the advantages of substantial height, big hands, big feet, but badly needed bulk, or so he believed—an air of unhealthy excess, of padding and exaggeration, hulking massiveness. If I could become more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously. (DeLillo 17)

Hitler, in the novel and in the opinion of its narrator, is little more than a signifier of excess—a designation of universal notoriety without a need for specific crimes. Hitler provides bulk to one's significance without need for specificity; he does not become a sacrosanct subject for the crimes of the Nazis, nor do those crimes seem to invite Gladney to treat Hitler and the Nazis with outrage or the trepidation appropriate to the Nazis' horror.

In one of the novel's only scenes featuring Jack teaching, for instance, his lesson centers on a description of Hitler as a mama's boy. The point of the lesson is not entirely obvious, nor is it particularly relevant given other topics concerning Hitler that seem more important (Hitler's rise to power, the seeming mesmerizing of the German people by Hitler, World War II, the Holocaust, etc.). Jack's observations only add to the cultural detritus that surround an idea of Hitler that is unfixed from any need of relevance or authenticity. Hitler, through Gladney's lesson, is reduced to a set of trivia—the person who knows the most about the mundane details is the Hitler expert and is acknowledged as enlarged by the position. Jack's friend and colleague Murray Siskand joins Gladney in the lecture by sharing his own knowledge of Elvis Presley so that the lecture eventually becomes a dual between the two experts over who knows more trivial details about the celebrity at the center of their discipline. Part of the scene's power resides in the fact that the lives of Hitler and Elvis are remarkably comparable—as if these trivial bits of biographical details add up to a strange formula for the creation of the powerful historical figures of popular culture.

Perhaps, the goal of Gladney's classroom is to show the psychological underpinnings that drove Adolf Hitler, and through him Germany, towards homicidal fascism, but the

theoretical assumptions upon which such a lesson relies reduce evil to a dysfunctional childhood (and a rather common one at that), and then, finally, likens those same assumptions to the rise of Elvis Presley and rock and roll. The analogy, having been taken too far, makes even the pop cultural icon Presley become like Hitler, or perhaps, more precisely, the specifics of both Presley and Hitler are made to seem unimportant compared to their shared characteristic of notoriety. History may have made them into celebrities, but once they attain that position, their histories become collections of trivia and myths.

Gladney's teaching scene shows the exploration of Nazism, as a subject for study, at its most facile. DeLillo is satirizing the drive to explain Hitler and evil away, to reduce him to a set of contexts, to ultimately cripple the designation of evil altogether, and to capitalize on that lack of designation in order to attain a sense of importance and gravity. Adding Hitler to a discussion, no matter what else the discussion might be, lends it a sense of seriousness commensurate with the atrocities of the Nazis. When Jack provides his pop-cultural analysis of Hitler, he reduces the atrocities of Nazi Germany to psychosis, robs them of their position as evil, and then universalizes them away from deviancy by including all other celebrities suffering from that same psychological profile. In reducing Hitler to a position of celebrity, Gladney makes the Hitler's circumstances important only in their similarity to the circumstances of other celebrities. The deaths of millions of people, and the extreme moral position suggested by genocide, become unimportant in the study of Gladney's Hitler, or perhaps only as important as Adolf Hitler's relationship with his mother.

Jack's attitude towards Hitler is in keeping with the novel's attitude, in general, about the modern world and its values. Everything in the novel has the capacity to be interpreted not only by the function it provides, but also by its function as a symbol of pop cultural values, as well as its capacity to comment on pop-cultural values, and its capacity for recursion: the novel's commentary on pop culture's obsession with itself as a subject for comment. The novel provides a non-stop stream of examples of this endless self-absorption such that it is futile to point to one of the novel's descriptions and mark it as the prime example of this tendency. Other critics, including Baudrillard, have used DeLillo's idea about the 'Most Photographed Barn in America' as a way of talking about *White Noise* and its satirical commentary on the fabricated nature of culture. The barn is photographed by present tourists precisely because it is the most photographed barn in America; its claim to fame is equivalent to the behavior that its fame invites.

Murray Siskand, a character who acts as a kind of cultural shaman in the novel, views the barn as a touchstone artifact for the study of American culture and spirituality. He offers, "Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism" (DeLillo 12). Part of the tension between Murray Siskand and Jack Gladney in the novel is that the falsehood of culture, like that implied by the 'Most Photographed Barn in America,' is comfortable for Murray. For Jack it gives no comfort at all—he is dying in a world that is fake, but his death is real, and therefore, a source of terror.



‘The Most Photographed Barn in the World’, however, is only one of many details that carry this particular kind of significance (which is, ironically, that the lack of significance is, itself, a kind of significance), none more or less important than the barn. Jack’s commentary as he tells the story, the skepticism and ignorance of his family, the various fascinations of Murray, and even the confusion of official knowledge as disseminated by experts (including Jack and Murray) all point to a condition of surfaces without depths and references without anything to refer to. Belief becomes nothing more than an empty act: one believes, in *White Noise*, not because there is something worth believing in, but simply because one has to do something. Belief is less about endorsement of a particular view of the world (based on assumptions about underlying principles), but about participation in a culture where belief is the only option for agency because there are no underlying principles that would validate one view as correct and another as incorrect. Those inherent, essential values that could have validated beliefs have been abandoned.

At one point in the novel, Jack bemoans the loss of essential value through science’s eradication of human nature. His is given cause for complaint because he has learned that the fear of death, the primal force that moves people to action, can be manipulated through artificial means such as the novel’s fictional drug, Dylar. While in bed with his wife Babette, he laments, “Heinrich’s brain theories. They’re all true. We’re the sum of our chemical impulses. Don’t tell me this. It’s unbearable to think about” (DeLillo 200). In a way, the complaint is suggestive of a shift from one kind of essential value, somewhat esoteric, to another more concrete group of essential characteristics to which

beliefs can be appealed for validation. Nonetheless, the newer system is totally bereft of humanity. Ethics and emotions are reduced to chemistry. Jack continues:

What happens to good and evil in this system? Passion, envy and hate? Do they become a tangle of neurons? Are you telling me that a whole tradition of human failings is now at an end, that cowardice, sadism, molestation are meaningless terms? Are we being asked to regard these things nostalgically? What about murdersou rage? A murderer used to have a certain fearsome size to him. His crime was large. What happens when we reduce it to cells and molecules? (DeLillo 200)

If the science of neurochemistry is right, then there is nothing validating one belief or behavior over another. All human attitude and experience can be reduced to value-neutral chemicals in the brain, as are all questions of social or ethical propriety surrounding those attitudes and experiences. If all values are dependent upon the context of neurochemistry then there is nothing to recommend against child molestation, murder, or any other of the great evils of humanity—it's all just as much a function of brain chemistry as anything else.

DeLillo's use of Hitler in this scheme puts an emphasis on this particular detail above all others (of which the novel presents us with multitudes precisely because of the way American culture is meant to resemble the meaningless flotsam and jetsam of beliefs without validation). Hitler is marked as the worst evil there could be and because no one can react to Hitler as the worst evil, DeLillo is using Jack's authority as a professor of Hitler studies to undermine all ethical evaluations and rationales up to and including those that might be used to condemn genocide. Hitler, in becoming a mama's boy rather than the engineer of the Holocaust, forces all issues of good and evil to be derivative of culture and not inherent truths. Hitler is as much a product of neurochemistry as anyone or anything else.

By introducing Hitler through Jack Gladney, Nazism, fascism, and even racism never become central issues in the novel despite the centrality of Hitler in the life of the novel's main character. For instance, Murray Siskand, Jack's best friend, is Jewish, but he sees nothing disconcerting about studying the trivialities of Hitler's life or the effect that such a study has on the overall depiction of Hitler as an anti-Semitic psychopath. The basic plot points of the novel: Gladney's family, the toxic airborne event that eventually introduces poison into Gladney's body, and Gladney's attempt to stem his fear of death through the mysterious Dylar drug make no reference to Nazism directly, and seem to have very little to do with Nazism indirectly. Nazism, in the dynamics of the novel, acts as little more than a symbolic wild goose inviting the reader to take chase—another surface without depth, but this time it is a surface for which the reader all but demands depth. In this way, it echoes analogies to Nazism in popular culture. That it is Nazism which is brought up by the novel demands some kind of commentary concerning relevance, even though the novel denies that relevance at every turn.

In *White Noise*, however, nothing has relevance. This isn't simply a matter of postmodern skepticism; Gladney's dilemma isn't necessarily that there is no fact, only opinion. Rather, this kind of skepticism is seen as one of any number of philosophies available to fill the void in Gladney's life. None of these theoretical schemes is validated by the novel's narrative. Whether it be the relativity of Heinrich who cannot be convinced of the evidence of his senses or the nuts and bolts answers offered by Gladney's father-in-law who is fine so long as his car works: all are meant to be taken as plausible answers to what one should do in order to supply relevance to life. This is Gladney's problem. He fears death, but ultimately his dilemma stems from his belief that

a man cannot die if his life has meaning. Only relevance will keep him alive. Hitler should have relevance because of the horror that surrounds him, this is why Jack chooses him, but Gladney's Hitler ends up being nothing more than trivial details unable to signify anything more deeply. The death that Gladney fears stands in for the presence of essential meaning that Hitler has covered up and subverted, both in the novel and in the culture that the novel satirizes. Hitler, in *White Noise*, critiques the moral position of evil that Nazi analogies have replaced and complicated

Ultimately, Gladney's study of Hitler has nothing to do with morality. In fact, morality is ultimately missing in *White Noise*. The options that are available to Gladney, whatever their source, seem already to be considered without reference to right and wrong long before Gladney realizes the repercussions of neurochemistry. After a woman tells Jack about a dangerous drug that stems the fear of death, the issues of drug use and drug addiction do not factor into his choice to search out Dylar. Jack's wife, Babette, has had an affair so that she can get the Dylar—she has no consideration of the moral repercussions, nor does it seem that Jack, upon hearing the details of the affair, is filled with rage for the betrayal. Strangely though, Jack's plan betrays that there is something real about his need to punish Mr. Gray. The novel explains first, that he will not shoot Mr. Gray because of the affair, then that he will shoot him, and finally that he will shoot him with “three bullets in the midsection for maximum visceral agony” in order to steal the drugs revealing a kind of narrative of vengeance placidly depicted by Jack who refuses to accept the significance of his wife's adultery (DeLillo 309). Perhaps the murder is to fulfill the suggestion for survival offered by Murray. During the murder of Mr. Gray, A.K.A. Willie Mink, Jack comments on the unnerving similarity between the

possibility of the murder and the advice given him by his friend: “This was similar to something Murray had once said. Murray had also said, ‘Imagine the visceral jolt, watching your opponent bleed in the dust. He dies, you live’” (DeLillo 308). Even in the midst of absolute moral crisis, Gladney sees no immorality in any of this. Details such as the “suicidal cult messages” he plans to write on “mirrors and walls,” as well as his appeal to the wisdom derived by Murray through his obsession with pop-culture, suggest that even the murder scene is losing its significance and becoming just another manifestation of behaviors contextualized in relation to murder scenes (DeLillo 309).

DeLillo’s satire actively points out what happens when serious moral transgressions like those implied by adultery, murder and Nazism are simply imported into a work through reference: the casualness of their insertion ceases to be an ethical dilemma and begins to threaten ethical definition in general. DeLillo’s goal in making Gladney a professor of Hitler studies is to show that the popularizing of Hitler and Nazism in this way is a reduction of significance that carries with it, not just moral consequence, but the seeds of destruction for the entire ethical system. The implication of Jack Gladney’s inability to see evil as part of his subject matter extends ultimately to his entire life which becomes, as a result, bereft of significance.

In the Summer of 2009, in a manner reminiscent of the collapse of ethics implied by *White Noise*, President Barack Obama attempted to create a national dialogue concerning health care reform through a series of “town meetings” hosted by members of Congress. The results were a strange melding of national dialogue and national narrative that devolved into absolute ethical confusion. The President’s plans for reform were first compared to Nazism in superficial ways (the infamous ‘Death Panels’ suggested first by

Sara Palin, and then adopted by other American conservatives), and then, later, blatantly, when Americans speaking out about the need for national health care began to hold signs with Obama pictured with a Hitler mustache, and then started to accuse speakers at the town meetings of supporting Nazi programs.

The result of the comparison was jarring. Massachusetts, Democratic Congressman Barney Frank answered one speaker's question, "why do you continue to support a Nazi policy?" by asking her, "On what planet do you spend most of your time?" Frank's answer was indicative of many American's concerns. Where did these comparisons come from, and how did Hitler and the Nazis enter into the health care debate? The answer to those questions is, however, rather simple. The right wing opponents of national health care reform wanted to call President Obama's health care plan evil—this is done in the United States by evoking Nazism. Nazi analogies have been used politically to support or attack nearly every war involving the United States since World War II and to demonize numerous domestic policies. They have been used to support and attack political groups and have even become part of the highly personal areas of identity politics, personal opinion and belief. Nazis not only are evil, they now define evil.

The regular objections one might think to posit (that giving people access to medical attention is quite the opposite of killing them, that Hitler would have shunned President Barack Obama for his skin color, that Obama is a member of the political left and that Nazis are located at the far right, that if Obama really were like Hitler dissension probably would never have been tolerated) are all immaterial. They're based on historical facts which are no longer needed for validation. Of the millions of people

protesting Obama's "Nazi policies," few did so based on their knowledge of the T4 program (the likely referent of 'Nazi national healthcare' alluded to by Palin), and many of the protesters were probably encouraged to do so by their ignorance of history. If women calling for free access to birth control pills can be called feminazis, and when the right to legal abortion can be called the Baby Holocaust or the Silent Holocaust (as it is on numerous Pro-Life websites), then why not call Obama a Nazi when he calls for free health care? Why not anyone?

What really is there to prevent anyone and anything from being like Hitler with the end result that everything can be denounced as being like a Nazi, without logic or capacity to repudiate that logic, and so the Nazi used in the analogy becomes a meaningless term? It does not represent evil, and so nothing does. Good and evil, as defined by this exemplary position, lack definition, but what other way is there to define them when all other definitions are subject to context? History is meaningless in this exchange.

During that same summer in which the provision of national health care became comparable to the atrocities conducted in death camps, director Quentin Tarantino tackled the subject of World War II and the Nazi enemy in his movie *Inglourious Basterds* providing a mass cultural example of the value history has in validating Nazi analogies. The movie was, and continues to be, quite popular. Its plot involves a Lieutenant Aldo Raine, a Tennessee moonshiner turned guerrilla warfare expert, who leads a group of Jewish volunteers, "the Basterds" behind enemy lines in Nazi occupied France before the invasion at Normandy where they perform hit and run missions against Nazi Germany. Basically, they kill any Nazi they meet. As Aldo points out to one of his

victims, “We’re in the killing Nazi business. And cousin, business is a-booming.”  
(*Inglourious Basterds*).

Part of the reason the Basterd’s operation is so successful is because Aldo and his band of assassins don’t really seem to know what a Nazi is. When Sergeant Donnie Donnowitz (nicknamed, the ‘Bear Jew’) is about to execute a Sergeant in the German Army, he asks the German “Did you get those medals for killing Jews?” to which the German replies, “Bravery.” The German commander is making a distinction concerning his efforts as a German soldier and separating them from the ideological atrocities of the Nazis. His answer suggests that he does not think of himself as a killer of Jews but as a soldier defending his country—an attitude which has, at the very least, historical validity.. The distinction that has no effect on the Basterds, though; Donnowitz beats the helpless German sergeant’s head in with a baseball bat to the cheers of his compatriots. In this scene it is the American who kills helpless prisoners, but the American is made to seem justified by the strange political delineation of the film. Donnowitz is allowed to kill the German soldier because he’s a Nazi, even though he isn’t really a Nazi, he only seems so to Raine’s Basterds who are too dead set on delivering Jewish vengeance to take account of their victims’ politics.

The Basterds kill anyone in uniform under the assumption that the German army is as composed of Nazis as the country’s political leadership, and it seem that it is precisely the uniform that is the problem for Raine’s men. Raine explains to one of his victims just before cutting a swastika into his head, “See we like our Nazis in uniform. That way you can spot them just like that. If you take off that uniform, aint nobody going to know you’s a Nazi, and that don’t sit well with us.” His explanation seems to suggest that the



Nazis are just like everyone else—that if they take off their uniform they will have no trouble blending in. It ignores salient defining characteristics such as the Nazis’ anti-Semitic and homicidal ideology under the premise that those sorts of things can be covered up—the Nazi’s identity as a Nazi does not depend upon them. It depends on their uniform, not their attitude.

Tarantino doesn’t seem to make any sort of real commentary on the problem of why the Basterds victims deserve to be victimized. It’s as if Tarrantino doesn’t know, just like his Basterds, that the average German soldier wasn’t a Nazi or that such a soldier wouldn’t have known, historically, what was happening within the Nazi camp system (nor would the Jewish American soldiers). Lastly, the success of the movie is dependent upon catharsis—the desires of the audience are fulfilled by watching ‘Nazis’ get brutally beaten to death by the “Jew Bear.” The goal of the film is to present what the character Shoshanna Dreyfus calls “the face of Jewish vengeance.” This intimates that the film’s audience is just as unconcerned as Tarantino and his Basterds with the fact that the soldier whose skull is cracked with a baseball bat or the numerous soldiers whom the Basterds scalp aren’t Nazis at all. The catharsis of the violence and the mass appeal of the film that depends on that catharsis are reliant upon the interchangeability of German soldiers with Nazis. That these assumptions are repudiated by historical fact is no matter. The Basterd’s enemies are called Nazis and no one, in the film’s mass audience anyways, calls them out as imposters. The history that would otherwise subvert the film’s fantasy is forgotten.

The film’s most blatant act of disregard for historical accuracy comes when the Basterds manage to lock Hitler in a burning theater and then shoot him point blank in the

face with machine guns. Within the world of the film, World War II is won even before the invasion of Normandy, though not before the Wannsee conference—the Holocaust has begun by the time the Basterds show up in Europe. The film, thus, represents a fantasy of what Americans might have accomplished had we just been able to drop some violent Jewish soldiers behind the line and let them loose on Hitler and his minions. History has no bearing on the logic of this fantasy, only that the Nazis (whoever they turn out to be) suffer and are destroyed. When the Nazi high command goes up in flame, they die with the face of Shoshanna Dreyfus projected onto the smoke of the burning theater. She looks like an Old Testament description of God, the pillar of fire that led Moses across the desert, and thus the film creates divine retribution for the Nazis' crimes and interprets it within a purely filmic milieu. The film provides appropriate retribution for the Nazis just as the projector makes Shoshanna Dreyfus into the face of God.

It's easy to dismiss *Inglourious Basterds* as nothing more than an American postwar fantasy about gaining retribution against the figures who define evil in American culture, but then the fantasy intrudes even upon itself. What does it mean to kill Nazis when they aren't really Nazis and why is it so satisfying to watch these imposters die? Clearly, the reason that the Basterds are Jewish is because of the Holocaust: their ethnicity entitles them to vengeance—but if the Nazis aren't real, then how real is the filmic Holocaust upon which the film's vengeful catharsis depends?

Moreover, the various Germans in the film, who do not identify as Nazis, question the logic of their inclusion among the Basterds' enemies, asking simple questions like why their German identity automatically makes them targets for scalplings and incinerations. Private Frederik Zoller, for instance, spends most of his time in the film attempting to

convince Shoshanna that he is not just a uniform. She is not convinced, but it is not so clear, that the audience is supposed to agree with Shoshanna in her indictment. Zoller is a baby faced soldier. His main exploit rests in his killing three hundred Americans in three days as a sniper in Italy. But despite his prowess (or luck) as a soldier, nothing recommends him as particularly bent towards the Nazi ideology. He's a kid. He attempts to use his connections with Joseph Goebbels to impress the girl he has a crush on. He isn't even quite smart enough to understand that as a French woman in occupied France, she neither likes Germans nor is impressed with German leadership.

One thing that is clear, however, is that Zoller isn't particularly proud of his exploits in the military. As he sits and watches the movie based on his exploits, he seems morose and goes to seek out the comfort of Shoshanna, explaining to her, "the fact remains, this film is based on my military exploits. And in this case, my exploits consist of killing many men. Consequently, the part of the movie that's playing right now...I don't like watching this part." The viewer gets the idea that Zoller would much rather be a young man attempting to win the affections of a young French woman—he invites the viewer's sympathies and ultimately complicates the idea that all Germans are, in the words of Raine, "the foot soldiers of a Jew hating, mass murdering maniac."

After (or perhaps because) the view of Nazi membership supported by *Inglourious Basterds* is called into question by the relative naiveté of Private Zoller, the tenor of the film's commentary through Zoller changes. In Zoller's last moments, he attempts to force himself on Shoshanna Dreyfus and is shot by her after having finally revealed himself as an attempted rapist as the finale to his otherwise uninterrupted role as a young doe-eyed German Army private. His death seems so out of character compared to

Zoller's attitude throughout the rest of the film that it suggests a problem with the ideology of the film itself. One innocent German in a uniform would, ultimately, make the tactics of Raine's bastards the product of psychosis rather than vengeance, and thus, at the last moment, Tarantino turns the nice German kid into a would-be Nazi rapist.

Zeller's attempt to de-Nazify himself is probably the movie's most successful, but he is hardly unique in his attempt at sympathy for his cause. When, for instance, Major Dieter Hellstrom of the SS plays a barroom game, the film introduces the notion of racism in the film, not through Hellstrom's anti-Semitism but through his commentary on American racist attitudes. He has been given the identity of a famous character on a card which everyone in the table can see except for him and he is to ask questions in order to discover the identity of the character. He asks whether he was from the jungle, whether he was brought to America by boat, whether he was brought there in chains, whether he was displayed in chains. Finally, he asks, "Am I the story of the Negro in America?" and when the other table members tell him, "no." He guesses, correctly, that he is King Kong.

Hellstrom's quirky mistake acts as a rhetorical ploy on the part of the film. The ability to conflate King Kong and the history of slavery in America suggests, first, that film creates its message through the creation of a myth. Thus, *Inglourious Basterds* is to be taken as a myth as well, a rewriting of the evil of Nazism to include, finally, its deserved retribution. What Major Hellstrom's confusion introduces to the myth, however, is complicated by the way the film comments on America's history of racism by putting its chronicle into the mouth of an SS officer. He is essentially saying that Germany is racist and that America is racist—what's the difference? In fact, the ease by which Hellstrom can move between racism's mythical analog in *King Kong* and its

historical counterpart in “the story of the Negro in America,” suggests that it is publicly hypocritical, for Americans at least, to condemn the Nazis for their racist ideology.

Later in the film, racism is removed from the argument completely when Colonel Hans Lander attempts to negotiate with Lieutenant Raine and Private First Class Utivich his surrender to the allied forces and the destruction of the four leading members of the Third Reich. Lander, when confronted by Raine concerning his epigram of “The Jew Hunter,” betrays deep offense at the nickname. He protests, “I’m a detective. A damn good detective. Finding people is my specialty so naturally I work for the Nazis finding people and, yes, some of them were Jews, but Jew Hunter...just a name that stuck.” It’s just a job—a job that he does well and that he did well before the Nazis. Now that the Nazis are in power, he works for them. It has nothing to do with race or ideology; for Lander, it is just a simple matter of natural ability. What’s clear also by his willingness to betray the third Reich is that he has no loyalty whatsoever to the leadership of Hitler. The war is nearing its end, Germany is going to lose, and so Lander is willing to betray his country so as to be on the winning side. Only the hunt has ever mattered to him.

What Lander, Hellstrom, and Zoller offer, then, is a serious argument about just what it means to be a Nazi and, therefore, to be evil. Is it racism? No. Because Americans are racist too. Is it their devotion to Nazi ideology? Clearly it isn’t—Zoller isn’t an ideologue at all nor, in the end, is Lander. What the film clearly implies is that some of the Germans were just soldiers, that some of the Germans were just doing their jobs, and that even the racist Nazis weren’t all that alien from their American counterparts. In the end, what it is that makes the Nazis worthy of the violent reaction against them, as implied by the film, altogether unclear. The movie is as much an indictment against the

undifferentiated condemnation by Raine and his men as it is a condemnation of Nazi Germany, its crimes and its leadership.

Except that in the end, in a kind of filmic rhetoric true of Raine, none of the counterarguments matter. The film has made an argument for understanding and then scalped those whom the audience is supposed to understand. It blows them up, it carves swastikas in their forehead, it opens fire on their faces with submachine-guns at point blank range. The ultimate message of the film seems to be that the logical other side, cogently represented, sympathetically rendered, is worthless—so what if the “Nazis” in the film don’t deserve to be beaten, tortured, and brutally murdered? The audience’s need for catharsis acts as motivation enough for the brutality, because the film fulfills the audience’s need to see the Nazis punished. The film’s rewriting of history suggests that historical fact has failed to provide resolution for the crime of the Holocaust, and so Tarantino rewrites history and provides a new narrative where the Nazis that should take the punishment for the Holocaust are destroyed.

The problem with the film’s logic, though, is that these Nazis remain fictional. Without a historical reality to help differentiate them, there is no clear sense of who deserves punishment and who doesn’t. Hitler, Goebbels, and Hellstrom are equally as guilty as Zoller. Lander is as guilty as everyone else even though his crime isn’t racist in origin, and if the crimes are racist in origin, then America is as guilty, historically, as Nazi Germany for its support of the slave trade and as equally deserving of being scalped by Aldo the Apache. In the end, the Nazi characters’ arguments for why they shouldn’t be tortured or shot are much better than the film’s arguments for why they should.

Overall, though, the film betrays a much larger problem with the culture of the audience through their popular reception of the film. If the film is to suggest a fantasy about how Nazi Germany should have been dealt with at the close of the war (shoot everyone who wore a uniform) then the film suggests that historical Nazis were not bad enough in their very real crimes to validate such an intense reaction. Tarantino's creation of a mythic Nazi to justify the basterds suggests that real Nazis wouldn't. So, what exactly is the audience of *Inglourious Basterds* cheering for when the Basterds slaughter their victims? Fake Nazis offering cogent arguments for why they shouldn't be counted among the legion of the film's fake Nazis confuses the film's issues to such a point that it is unclear where the real Nazi is in the filmic rhetoric. The audience cheers because someone has been called a Nazi and then that character indicted as a Nazi has his head beaten in. That the victim is a Nazi in name only is of no matter and not worth exploring. In fact, by scratching the surface of the film's indictment of Nazism, American racism is quickly implied.

These Nazi as they appear in contemporary American culture demonstrate the problematic state of evil in American ethics since the Second World War. In *Inglourious Basterds*, the Nazis are the villains precisely because the film's heroes are shooting them. In fact, they must be particularly bad given the degree of brutality the basterds employ while dealing with the Nazis. The image matches the confusion of the Nazi metaphor in the history of its rhetorical usage. The use of Nazism to indict national health care, for instance, suggests that the public's stance on altruism itself is dependent on the fluidity of Nazism and its presumed ability to define evil—giving aid to the sick is made to seem a characteristic of Nazism.

In the end, a context dependent system of ethics built in reaction to the essentialism of the Nazis simply cannot be sustained. The solidity that it would need to determine states of morality or immorality are never immune to the very mechanisms it uses for its evaluations. In *Inglorious Basterds*, for instance, the desire to punish Nazism with Jewish vengeance is so strong that it erases historical Nazism in its severity. Each time the Nazi is evoked it changes a bit: soup Nazis, feminazis, crypto-Nazis, safety Nazis, Nazis in *Schindler's List*, Nazis in *Hellboy*, Nazis in *Inglorious Basterds*, until finally their meaning is lost even as their connotation remains—they define the moral position of evil but nothing remains constant to define them. Baudrillard suggests that the illusion of scandal is evoked to conceal the fact that there is no scandal. He stops short. The illusion of evil prevents the definition of evil. Nazism has become amorphous and able to accept any analogy, and therefore, any censure, as valid. Nazism as evil's epitome supplies only the comfort that America knows what evil is, but with the side that it otherwise prevents investigation into the absence of moral definition; Americans needn't codify evil when they have the Nazis to use as a universal model for comparison.

Rorty's utopia is simply impossible; his assumptions about irony justify qualifications for right and wrong that are so liberal as to prevent any value from taking hold at all. Every value has the capacity to be interpreted as both right and wrong, since evil is defined as being like Nazism, and anything can be compared to Nazism in some form. Without an essential position of ethical value, it ceases even to be clear why one should prefer utopia to dystopia as both are equally condemnable as being like Nazism.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stead's Law is similar in that it suggest that "any discussion between more than 2 Pagans will eventually come around to Christianity," but it doesn't suggest that reference to Christianity will necessarily end the conversation (Skirvin).

<sup>2</sup> Emerson here, I think, deserves special mention since it is not at all clear that he so easily fits into either the category of essentialism or context dependency. His designation of "Beauty" clearly points to a thing both transcendent and determined by human imagination. Thus nature's essential characteristics are directly related to the capacity of human beings to consider them: "Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right. Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in harmony of both" (Emerson 11). To complicate further, for Emerson, human imagination is a product of the nature which it investigates.

<sup>3</sup> Rorty's position is not original. His use of irony is itself drawn from Kierkegaard's description of Socrates and Christ in *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. Furthermore, I would be remiss given the first chapter of this work if I weren't to mention the point-counterpoint of Tlönian works of non-fiction in the Borges story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Mark Frisch's analysis of this Tlönian peculiarity suggests the very same point made by Rorty:

The fact that all philosophies must give expression to opposing points of view also emphasizes that this world allows for multiple, competing perspectives, rather than exclusive, monistic visions. It has implications for a discourse on ideas and freedom of expression as well (51).

<sup>4</sup> "Genocide" and "Holocaust" have become interchangeable terms with the systematic murder of European Jewry. However, the history of these terms reveals a deep misunderstanding of the nature of Nazi atrocities including the tendency to lump all the atrocities together (all people incarcerated, tortured, or murdered in the camps) or to use these terms to denote atrocities and the results of the Nazi war machine (since it so often targeted civilian populations). The term genocide was available almost immediately after the war but its use early on in relation to the Nuremberg trials made it come to denote all Nazi war crimes. The term Holocaust was available early on as well but would not come into popular usage as the attempted destruction of European Jewry until the decade of the 1970s.

<sup>5</sup> Russia did not necessarily welcome these deportations. Many, especially anarchists, were rounded up and imprisoned as soon as they set foot on Russian soil.

<sup>6</sup> The term nationalist as it was used in the interwar decades is essentially synonymous with what fascism would come to mean after the Second World War. It is important to note, however, that most nations that we now consider fascist in retrospect, did not call themselves fascist at the time, but were rather nationalists: Nazis were national socialists, and the generals that supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War were part of Spain's Nationalist party.

<sup>7</sup> Sacco and Vanzetti were vulnerable to false accusations because of their status as recent immigrants.

<sup>8</sup> Its directness concerning social issues was a selling point for fascism on the world stage. Its claims for immediacy were often tied to its claims at having constructed a totalized state to maximize efficiency.

<sup>9</sup> In some cases, policies of forced sterilization were also put in place against Native American populations and economically destitute women.

<sup>10</sup> In 1920, Lothrop Stoddard made a commercial success with his book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*.

<sup>11</sup> There is ample reason to believe that Germany was recovering from its financial hardships when Hitler began to come to power. The Nazis simply took credit for the recovery.

<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Germans suggest that Germany was as little predisposed as America to take belligerent politicians at their word. In an anonymous postwar interview of a Nazi doctor, referred to by his interviewer as Karl K., K. offers:

There was no one in Germany or in the whole world who had not heard Hitler's and Streicher's proclamation that the Jews had to be exterminated...Everybody heard that. And everybody "heard past it." Because nobody believed that such a reality would come into practice...And suddenly one is confronted with the fact that what one used to, my God! take for propaganda verbiage is now totally, completely, wholly matter-of-fact and strategically concrete, that it is being realized with 100-percent strategy. That above all shook one. That one did not foresee...you knew it, and all of a sudden you are standing in front of it. Did you *really* know it? (Lifton 204)

If a doctor steeped in Nazi ideology within the national boundaries of Germany could be taken aback by the seriousness of the final solution, then what could be expected of people continents away who had no real inundation into a crime so heinous that it wouldn't even have a name until 1944?

<sup>13</sup> At the 1936 Inter-American Conference on Peace held in Montevideo, Uruguay, the twenty-one member nations adopted a resolution intended to muzzle the film industry by prohibiting the production or exhibition of any feature that might offend another nation or romanticize war. (Birdwell 22)

<sup>14</sup> The same year as the release of *The Great Dictator*, UFA would produce *Jud Süß* the most inflammatory anti-Semitic film propaganda of the Nazi period of German film (and probably the most inflammatory produced before or after). Allies later brought the film's director, Veit Harlan, to trial for the film but like Leni Riefenstahl, he claimed that Goebbels controlled the production of the film and was therefore responsible for its merits as propaganda. Harlan was acquitted.

<sup>15</sup> In 1931, for instance, F. Scott Fitzgerald published "Babylon Revisited" about an American returning to Paris after the stock market crash to find the world inhospitable. The party over, the story's main character, Charlie Wales, is forced to realize that his amorality in Paris has cost him the life of his wife and the custody of his daughter. His attempt to escape conventional essentialist morality has, as it does in most American dystopian fiction from this period, failed.

<sup>16</sup> Reports of anti-Semitism began as soon as the Nazis came to power. In a 1933 letter written to the League of Nations, Michael Williams (editor of *Commonweal*, a Catholic weekly review) wrote, "[w]hat you will decide to do is your concern. Either harden your hearts and let the worst crime of our age proceed in the deliberate extinction of nearly 1,000,000 men, women, and children, or come quickly and strongly to the rescue" (Abzug 15). In an article printed in the *Chicago Tribune*, 1933, Edmund Taylor wrote

On the nights of March 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, bands of Nazis throughout Germany carried out wholesale raids to intimidate the opposition, particularly the Jews. As hundreds have sworn in affidavits, men and women were insulted, slapped, punched in the face, hit over the heads with blackjacks, dragged out of their homes in night clothes, and otherwise molested... The arrest of innocent Jews was sanctioned as 'protective jailing'... This party [the Nazis] at its meetings and in its newspapers, books, and pamphlets has made the Jew appear loathsome and sinister in the eyes of its followers. (Abzug 18)

<sup>17</sup> This occurred on June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1934. It is known generally as "The Night of the Long Knives," in which Hitler purged the party, through a series of political assassinations, of the influence of Ernst Röhm, then leader of the Sturmabteilung (SA, or Brown Shirts). Röhm had designs to replace Germany's military with the revolutionary volunteers in the SA. By having Röhm murdered (along with other incendiary members of party leadership), Hitler was able to make peace with the Reichswehr and eliminate a political rival. The Nazis also took this opportunity to round up their political enemies (socialist leadership, unfriendly journalists, and liberals) and to put them into concentration camps.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most detrimental stereotype against Jewish emigrants was that they could not, or would not, be assimilated. This particular stereotype is referred to as the “Jewish Problem” and it is to this problem that Hitler’s “Final Solution” refers.

<sup>19</sup> Laws were passed, for instance, to keep unaccompanied minors from entering the country and foreign consulates “had strict orders to make entry to the United States as difficult as humanly possible by asking for documents that could not be obtained” (Laquer 130). Roosevelt, who might have otherwise been more sympathetic to the cause of the German Jews, went along with this general climate concerning emigration because it was politically unsafe to do otherwise. According to polls in 1938, “80% of American public opinion ... were against the immigration of refugees” (Laquer 129). \

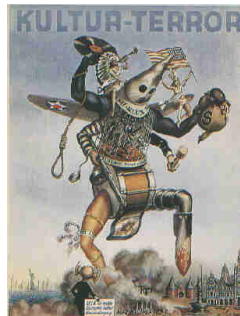
<sup>20</sup> In Ellie Wiesel’s novel *Night*, the Jewish community of Sighet, Transylvania does not believe the description of mass murder given to them by Moeshe the Beadle who has escaped a Nazi firing squad. In many ways, *Night* is demonstrative of the world’s reticence taken to its extreme: like the rest of the world, the Jewish community threatened by the Nazis does not believe the stories of Nazi atrocities simply because they seem too far fetched to be true in the modern age.

<sup>21</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, On-Line, Raphael Lemkin first used the word “genocide” in 1944 in his work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, ix. 79: “By ‘genocide’ we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group.”

<sup>22</sup> Many also shared the particular Nazi stereotype that Bolshevism and Judaism were intrinsically linked. Thus, in punishing Jews, Hitler was also punishing communists whom America, by and large, saw as dangerous.

<sup>23</sup> Totalitarianism would not achieve its apotheosis as a dystopia until 1948 through George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Before that time, it is the value of the totalized state that produce dystopia and not the means of enforcing those values through totalitarianism.

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, the Nazis painted Democracy as dystopian using the same definition of dystopia utilized in the United States: dystopia as a state in which contextually dependent ideology had replaced essentialism and created amorality. According to Nazi Dr. Ernst Hanftstaengl, “Democracy has no convictions for which people would be willing to stake their lives” (*Why We Fight: The Nazi Strikes*). Nazi propaganda posters generally showed America as being both racially integrated and racially intolerant. The critique being that American culture had no understanding of essential values. Here is an example:



<sup>25</sup> Birdwell points out that “all of the film studios except 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox were headed by Jewish Immigrants and all but Warner Bros. operated under the delusion that they could continue to do business with the Nazis” (20).

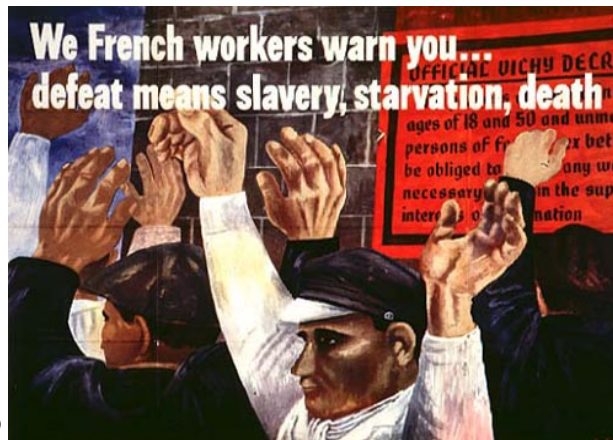
<sup>26</sup> In 1942, the Warsaw Jewish Bund contacted the Polish Jewish Government in exile and detailed the information they had gathered, including the forced ghettoization of the Warsaw Jews. According to Holocaust historian Martin Gilbert:

The Bund report from Warsaw, which reached London in June 1942 and was broadcast at once over the BBC, sought to give a comprehensive summary of what was known to the Jews of Warsaw at the time of its compilation, sometime in May. The report mentioned Chelmno, and, thanks to the escapee Yakov Grajonowsky, who had told his tale in Warsaw, it described the killings at Chelmno in detail. Of the deportation of 25,000 Jews from Lublin, ...the report could only venture the phrase 'carried off to an unknown destination in sealed railway cars.' (542) The information was made public months before the release of *Casablanca*.

<sup>27</sup> Germany referred to this depiction as “the war myth”: that Germany had started World War I and that it deserved its fate. Hitler used the idea of the war myth to rally Germany’s starving unemployed to his cause.

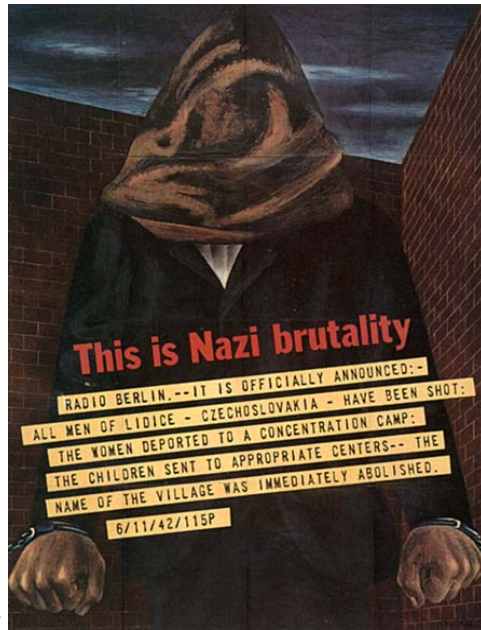
<sup>28</sup> Peter Lorre, as a Jew, had escaped mistreatment in Nazi Germany by coming to America. In *Casablanca*, he plays an Eastern European—there is nothing about the character that identifies him as Jewish.

<sup>29</sup> Rick echoes a sentiment advertised in the *New York Times* for the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies published June 10, 1940, which read, "We now know that every step the French and British fall back brings war and world revolutions closer to US--our country, our institutions, our hopes of peace" (“Stop Hitler Now!”).



30

<sup>31</sup> These two posters are not only the only two posters which actively depict real Nazi atrocities committed in Europe, they are also the only two posters designed by Ben Shahn to be accepted as part of America’s wartime poster propaganda campaign. Shahn’s other work was rejected because it lacked the patriotic elements that the Office of War Information (OWI) wanted in their propaganda (Morse).



32

33 The enormous documentary “The World At War” begins with images of Oradour-sur-Glane, a town murdered by German soldiers and left as a ghost town at war’s end to serve as a World War II memorial.



34

35 Udet was a World War I German flying ace.

36 Note how closely this mirrors the definition of genocide which is now so politically charged that various genocides are denied their definition as such because it would challenge the position of people currently in power. The Armenian genocide, for instance, threatens to vilify an ally of Israel, and the

United States will not recognize its treatment of the North American Native peoples as genocide despite all of the evidence to the contrary.

<sup>37</sup> I am presenting this here as the mechanism for the problem at hand, which is the function of an ethical epitome within context dependent philosophy and the stability of such an epitome given its being embedded in a system defined by the caprices of culture. Underlying the assumption I make here is an incredibly complex set of questions about the interrelation between context dependency, nominalism, and essentialism which I cannot discuss here without turning this discussion of depictions of Nazism in American culture into a discussion of the essentialism of context, or the context of essentialism. For further reading on that subject, I suggest Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, which tangentially addresses the place of absolute evil (through Auschwitz) inside of a philosophical point of view that that refutes absolutes.

<sup>38</sup> There were, of course, still fascists and even fascist nations around after the war. Spain, for instance, had stayed out of the war and so Franco managed to stay in power until 1975. However, the general global climate towards fascism was belligerent. Certainly no new national governments have come to power since World War II under the banner of "fascism" though many political movements have had fascist sensibilities.

<sup>39</sup> "Fat Man" was dropped on Nagasaki Japan August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

<sup>40</sup> Russia did not necessarily welcome these deportations. Many, especially anarchists, were rounded up and imprisoned as soon as they set foot on Russian soil.

<sup>41</sup> The term nationalist as it was used in the interwar decades is essentially synonymous with what fascism would come to mean after the Second World War. It is important to note, however, that most nations that we now consider fascist in retrospect, did not call themselves fascist at the time, but were rather nationalists: Nazis were national socialists, and the generals that supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War were part of Spain's Nationalist party.

<sup>42</sup> The melting pot nature of Russia was a particular difficulty for Hollywood to portray. Difference in Hollywood relies heavily on stereotypes, and Hollywood simply had no idea what Russian ethnic stereotypes were so as to play off of them.

<sup>43</sup> One should take note of how easily this rhetoric built on the wartime propaganda of division between Axis and Allies. Near the beginning of *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, the film quotes Vice President Henry A. Wallace: "This is a fight between a free world and a slave world." Germany, Italy, and Japan were depicted as turning their nations into slaves. After the war, the totalitarian depiction of Russia effectively made Russia a slave-state as well.

<sup>44</sup> According to the OED, attributed to B.B. Carter's translation of *Sturzo's Italy & Fascismo*.

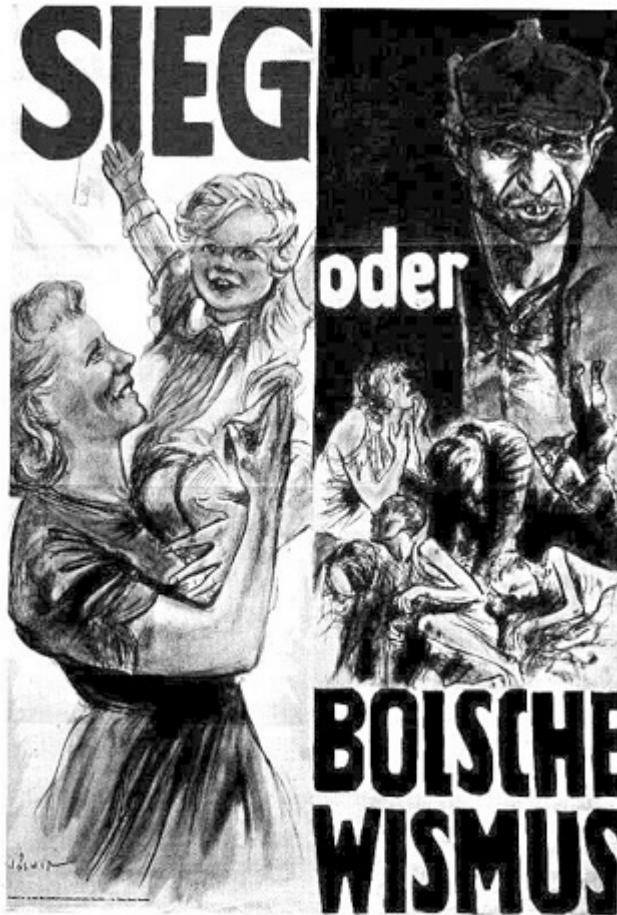
<sup>45</sup> A totalitarian war, for instance, indicated a war in which all of a nation's targets were considered military.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, "Social Policy in the New Germany," a globally disseminated piece of propaganda for Nazi Germany, attempted to "explain to the foreigner some typical examples of the character and content of the German social policy," and was intended to "serve all those who are minded to estimate the new structure of the German State" (3). In it, the Dr. Bruno Rauecker writes, "The new Germany is a 'total state,' that is, it claims to be viewed and estimated, both from outside and from inside, as a unit, and to operate, both within and without, as a unit, an undivided whole. Its supreme standard is the well being of its people, to which that of the individual is subordinated" (5). Clearly the work lionizes the term 'total state.'

<sup>47</sup> “The Communist parties, which were very small in all these eastern states of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.” (Churchill 804)

<sup>48</sup> Popper wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (published 1945) during the war in which he would develop the notion of the Nazism as a misreading of historicism. This would open an entire realm of theorizing totalitarianism of which Leo Strauss is perhaps the most famous proponent (due primarily to his link with the neo-conservative movement).

<sup>49</sup> Hitler’s rhetoric made plain that Bolshevism was to be seen as a Jewish ideology: Judao-Bolshevism. The Jewish nature of German anti-Bolshevist propaganda is fairly clear in its wartime posters:



This poster displays the obvious markings of the Bolshevik as the German caricature of the Jew as vermin with his long nose and rat-like teeth.

<sup>50</sup> “By linking the seemingly hostile doctrines of fascism and communism, the term “totalitarianism” drew the focus away from the specific content of belief systems to the structure of those belief systems. Totalitarian belief systems were held with a rigid intensity that could accept no opposition; they were the antithesis of tolerance and pluralism” (Alpers 243)

<sup>51</sup> The Soviet’s own phrasing of their taking of Eastern Europe had historical basis. Russia had a history of being attacked through Poland, and thus Russia wanted control over the Polish government.

Furthermore, as Germany had been the military aggressor in many of those attacks, Russia simultaneously wanted a Germany devastated beyond its capacity to make war.

<sup>52</sup> In the conclusion to his attack on the pro-Russian philosophy of the war, *America's Second Crusade*, Chamberlin points out:

Nor have the Four Freedoms played any appreciable part in shaping the postwar world...But one of the main consequences of the war was a vast expansion of Communist power in eastern Europe and in East Asia. It can hardly be argued that this has contributed to greater freedom of speech, expression, and religion, or, for that matter, to freedom from want and fear." (339)

<sup>53</sup> The term "Cold War" is acknowledged as originating in a speech given by Bernard Baruch (and written by Herbert Bayard Swope) but became popularized by Walter Lippman's book *Cold War*. Both venues brought the term into public notice by 1947 (Gaddis 54)

<sup>54</sup> Strangely, Japan was rarely included though it bore as much resemblance to the other axis powers as Communist Russia did. Italy, which actually referred to itself as totalitarian, dropped out as an example early on.

<sup>55</sup> Hannah Arendt points out that "totalitarian movements use and abuse democratic freedoms in order to abolish them" (*Origins of Totalitarianism* 306). Still, Hitler was popularly elected after all, and Stalin was not.

<sup>56</sup> I'm specifically thinking of "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)" in which Derrida attempts to formulate a post-Atomic critical stance. The article is steeped heavily in deconstruction and is interesting for its ability to turn the critical eye on the language of nuclear proliferation and disarmament, if not for its innovation.

<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche discusses monumental history in the second section of *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*

<sup>58</sup> One of the most common trope of the Cold War nuclear war film is the pretend attack. "On A Day Called X," for instance, shows Portland, Oregon calmly evacuating the town. In the film "1947, Year of Division," the narrator describes the town of Mossony, Wisconsin which pretends to be communists for twenty four hours as an experiment.

<sup>59</sup> There are numerous reasons why Anne Frank proves problematic to this discussion (*The Diary of a Young Girl* was released in English in 1951, inspired a play by 1955, and inspired a film by 1959). Part of the critical attention these works have had in regards to the Holocaust, whether they engender understanding of genocide and whether they are understood as Jewish is obviously important to this discussion. I do not include the story of Anne Frank because it doesn't explicitly address Nazi brutality and genocide in the way that, say, *Judgment at Nuremberg* addresses the subject. The personal nature of the work simply did not allow for the scope of understanding for the mass American audience, and there seems to be little indication that after watching *The Diary of Anne Frank* (as Americans surely did) anybody came away with the realization that the evil of the Nazis depended upon the millions of other Anne Franks whose stories they had not heard, or if this was understood, that these stories were inherently Jewish making the crime of Nazism not just wartime brutality but a campaign of extermination undertaken under the concealment of war. This is what *Judgment at Nuremberg* hints at and what the trial of Adolph Eichmann made explicit by describing the Nazi's "Jewish problem" and their "Final Solution."

<sup>60</sup> My own reading of this scene draws heavily from Scott Simmons reading of the novel in his 1978 article "Beyond the Theater of War: *Gravity's Rainbow* as Film".

<sup>61</sup> The foreword of the study begins with a recap of the violence committed by the Nazis so as to contextualize a study of the authoritarian personality in America according to the repercussions of the authoritarian personality of Nazi Germany.



<sup>62</sup> To a lesser extent, the study also looked at its participants' attitudes towards the conditions of African Americans, but the concentration is clearly on anti-Semitism.

<sup>63</sup> Political theorists of anti-Semitism Harold E. Quinley and Charles Y. Glock would call this a cognitive block towards anti-Semitism—the beliefs held are anti-Semitic, but aren't recognizable as such to the persons who hold such a belief (and who may not think of themselves as anti-Semitic).

<sup>64</sup> Obviously, American racism had not, as far as Americans were concerned, resulted in a Holocaust. However, at the outbreak of the Cold War, widespread knowledge of the details of the Holocaust was not part of popular public knowledge. America had been given scenes of the death camps so as to inform them of the scope of the Nazi atrocities. However, those films described the victims of the Nazi atrocities in terms of their politics and political action against the Nazis, and not, primarily, their ethnicity. Knowledge of the Holocaust was different from one individual to the next.

<sup>65</sup> Michael N. Dobkowski offers a whole chapter ("Don't Send These To Me") to the subject of American conceptions of a Jewish Problem in his book *The Tarnished Dream: The Basis of American Anti-Semitism*.

<sup>66</sup> The "purge" is not unique to anti-Semitism. As a political tool, it's most infamous usage is the Great Purge committed by Stalin against his enemies between 1936 and 1938. Apropos to the point being made here, the Great Purge has been called "The Soviet Holocaust" by numerous authors, thus equating the practices of the communists with those of the Nazis to solidify the definition of a totalitarian enemy. The question remains, however, whether or not the purges referenced by the SPSI were primarily against Jews as McCarthy and his supporters suggested. Clearly, they were against the enemies first of Stalin and then of Khrushchev—Jewish or not. Russian anti-Jewish pogroms were common under the Czars; and the "doctor's trials" revealed Joseph Stalin as an anti-Semite. The Great Purge of the 1930s under the then-Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin, and the purge of Lavrenty Beria's supporters by Khrushchev were not, however, anti-Semitic in nature.

<sup>67</sup> According to *American Jewish History*: "there was an effort made by leaders of the anti-Communist movement to include Jews in their ranks or at least to claim Jewish support. The American Jewish Committee, for example, was invited to join the All-American Conference to Combat Communism in 1950." (Gurock 587).

<sup>68</sup> Of the fourteen essays in *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, for instance, only one deals with the anti-Semitism of the black list: "The House I Live In: Albert Malz and the fight against anti-Semitism."

<sup>69</sup> The argument that Holocaust survivors' silence resulted from a need to assimilate worked in direct opposition to anti-Semitic stereotypes which positioned Jews as unwilling or unable to assimilate.

<sup>70</sup> Later, Hitler would expatriate the Jews, but in the 30s, Ashkenazi Jews were Germans by nationality. In fact, "German refugees" became cold war code for Jews and refugee organizations, such as "The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee" (one of the so-called communist front organizations to which Dashiell Hammett was linked) was viewed simultaneously as Jewish and communist.

<sup>71</sup> Occasionally, McCarthy broke procedure by allowing the media to cover some of the tribunals that were going to be obviously successful. Technically, because of the security clearances of those from the State department who were called to testify, he should not legally have been allowed to put the testimony either on radio or on television. The legality of this practice was never pursued with much enthusiasm though, because it would have meant protesting on behalf of known communists.

<sup>72</sup> The McCarran-Walter Act, passed in January of 1952, allowed the Department of Justice to deport naturalized citizens who had been found to be engaged in subversive activities. Less official

deportations happened when a person simply could not find work in their field due to one of the many blacklists.

<sup>73</sup> Part of Stander's testimony is engraved on the "The First Amendment Blacklist Memorial" at University of Southern California dedicated to the victims of the Hollywood blacklist.

<sup>74</sup> The formative psychologist of an OSS report on Hitler's psychology in 1943, Dr. Walter C. Langer, in his later book *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* used testimony concerning Geli given by ex-Nazi Otto Strasser, to ascribe to Hitler "an extreme form of masochism in which the individual derives sexual gratification from the act of having a woman urinate or defecate on him" (134). Strasser had been expelled from the the Nazi party in 1930 because, according William Shirer, "he had taken seriously not only the word 'socialist' but the word 'workers' in the party's official name of National Socialist German Worker's Party" and was, thereafter, an enemy of the Nazis and Hitler himself (147). His testimony, and the image of Hitler as a figure of deviant sexuality, is hardly credible. Nevertheless, the myth of Hitler's deviant sexuality is sometimes taken as fact.

<sup>75</sup> Colonel Klink ran a military camp in *Hogan's Heroes* and was, therefore, part of the Luftwaffe, not the SS. In the film, *Auto Focus* (a film about the sexual addiction of *Hogan's Heroes* star, Bob Crane), Crane is berated by Ed Begley Jr.'s character, Mel Rosen, for shamelessly making a television sit-com about the Holocaust even though *Hogan's Heroes* isn't really about the Holocaust.

<sup>76</sup> The term was coined in Reagan's speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1983. The exact phrase in which the term is used is: "So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride - the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil."

<sup>77</sup> The number of times Ronald Reagan was evoked as a Nazi in American punk music makes it impossible to catalog them all here. Here is one example from The Dead Kennedys remake of "California Uber Alles" entitled, "We've Got A Bigger Problem Now":

Don't forget our house special, it's called a Trickie Dickie Screwdriver/  
It's got one part Jack Daniels, two parts purple Kool-Aid/  
and a jigger of formaldehyde from the jar with Hitler's brain  
in it we got in the back storeroom/  
Happy trails to you. Happy trails to you./  
I am emperor Ronald Reagan/  
born again with fascist cravings/  
still you made me president/  
human rights will soon go away/  
I am now your shah today/  
now I command all of you/  
now you're going to pray in school/  
I'll make sure they're Christian too/  
California Uber Alles.

<sup>78</sup> This was played out in numerous films, notably, *The Omen III: The Final Conflict* (1981), *The Dead Zone* (1983), and *Dreamscape* (1984).

<sup>79</sup> The assumption is fairly common throughout histories of Holocaust consciousness in America.

<sup>80</sup> The same is true of the Holocaust laden comedy like *South Park* and *Sacha Baron Cohen*.

<sup>81</sup> Ironically, the camp liberation films far outstripped the evils attributed to Nazism in wartime propaganda. The reality of the atrocities was far more horrible than its fictional counterpart.

<sup>82</sup> *Heroes* has its own, less obvious link, to Nazi Germany. One of the show's characters, Hana Gitelman, a "cyberpath," is the grand-daughter of an anti-Nazi resistance fighter ("Hana Gitelman").

<sup>83</sup> Lyotard calls this deciding factor a Differand, but it is clear from his description that the Holocaust, which could fill this role, can not. It is too horrible to allow for mundane comparisons.

<sup>84</sup> The particular episode of *Star Trek* which deals with Nazis in space is "Patterns of Force."

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