

U.S. Foreign Policy

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CHAPTER 26

DOCUMENT SET 1

Hollywood's Foreign Policy: Interventionism in American Films, 1939–1940

The first section of Chapter 26 is devoted to the final stage of the neutrality period. From 1939 on, American public opinion shifted toward a more activist role in support of the democracies' struggle against fascism. Your text notes the increasing interest in interventionist literature and radio programming at this time; but equally significant were feature films, some of them addressing the escalating crisis in Europe. The following documents focus on two motion pictures, one produced in 1939 and one in 1940, that show how feature films can shed light on both popular and elite cultures.

In September 1941, isolationist senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota charged that in the nation's movie capital, "one speaks not of the foreign policy of the United States but of the foreign policy of Hollywood." His rhetoric reflected the reality that some movie producers had entered the national foreign policy debate with topical films containing a strong interventionist bias.

An important cinematic breakthrough occurred in 1939, when Warner Brothers declared war on Germany with *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, a strident exposé of the pro-fascist German-American Bund. Alerted to the pro-fascist German-American Bund activities of a Nazi spy ring by Roosevelt, Jack Warner decided to use the film to call attention to the potential for German subversion in the United States. Review the excerpt from screenwriter Milton Krims's shooting script for an indication of the film's political bias, and search Pare Lorentz's review for clues to critical and public reactions to the film.

The second group of documents focuses on the Walter Wanger–Alfred Hitchcock thriller, *Foreign Cor-*

respondent (1940). Review the textbook account of the escalating German offensive of spring 1940, which provides the historical background for this film. Try to determine Wanger's intent in producing this film at this time. As you consider the public impact of *Foreign Correspondent*, review the letter from Wanger's friend, Marcus Rebeck.

Political reaction to Hollywood's new stance was sharp and quick, as revealed in Montana senator Burton K. Wheeler's letters to Paramount News and movie czar Will Hays. Isolationist anxieties reached a climax in Nye's St. Louis speech, which detailed the charges against the film industry. Examine these remarks to gain the isolationists' perspective on the forces at work on American public opinion in 1941. The end result, a Senate investigation of movie propaganda, revealed the depth of antiwar sentiment as the nation edged toward intervention.

Reacting to the Senate attacks, the movie producers engaged former presidential candidate Wendell Willkie as defense counsel for the hearings. Willkie's letter to the investigating committee revealed not only his own interventionist bias (see textbook account of the 1940 campaign), but also indicated Hollywood's the 1940 campaign), our anti-war responsibility. As belief in its educational role and public responsibility. As you evaluate Willkie's remarks, reflect on the significance of film content as an expression of the movie industry's perception of popular values. Your analysis of the evidence should focus on the state of American opinion concerning intervention as well as on government and media roles in shaping public attitudes.

Questions for Analysis

1. As you review the film script excerpts, can you determine why senators Nye and Wheeler were so concerned about the film industry in 1941? To what extent were their fears and suspicions justified? Explain.
2. What were the backgrounds of Jack Warner, Walter Wanger, Alfred Hitchcock, and some of the other Hollywood figures active in the effort to incorporate topical subject material into films produced between 1939 and 1941? To what extent did personal background and political affiliation influence Hollywood productions?
3. In what way can a motion picture be understood as a historical document? Do films reflect popular values and attitudes? Or do they influence public opinion in a particular direction? Defend your position, using the evidence from the film scripts and textbook background as you develop your case.
4. What larger issues were raised by Nye's attack on the motion-picture industry? Using Willkie's letter as a primary source, explain what the producers and studio

heads believed to be at stake in 1941. Which position was most persuasive? Why?

5. The final version of *Foreign Correspondent*, released in August 1940, was set in London. How would you account for this revision of the final shooting script of June 5, 1940? What was the result?
6. The term *propaganda* appears frequently in the documents. How would you define the term? If Walter Wanger believed in the interventionist position, why did he object to the term being applied to his work, including *Foreign Correspondent*? Do you think the term applies to the films coming out of Hollywood between 1939 and 1941? Why or why not?

1. Warner Brothers Declares War on the German-American Bund, 1939

CONFESSIONS OF A NAZI SPY

by
Milton Krims
and
John Wexley
Based on the articles of
Leon G. Turrour
Directed
by
Anatole Litvak
Supervisor, Lord

328. Newspaper Headlines

**U.S. ATTORNEY DEMANDS
INDICTMENT
HIGH NAZI OFFICIALS!!**

**German Naval Intelligence Chief
Indicted in U.S. Spy Ring**

**Grand Jury Indicts Eighteen
Including Nazi Officials**

**NAZI SPY TRIAL STARTS
TOMORROW!!!**

331. Close Shot Kellog Another Angle

KELLOG:

. . . In simple language, the indictment means that this group of defendants conspired to secure secret information about our national defense and to transmit this information to the advantage of a foreign government—namely, Germany!

332. Full Shot Court

Commotion and hubbub of voices. Jury reacting. Reporters reacting big. Messengers rushing out.

KELLOG'S VOICE:
(deliberately)

I wish to make it perfectly clear—that this conspiracy was conceived in and operated directly by the present German Government.

333. Close Shot Kellog Another Angle

KELLOG:
(continuing)

. . . It has been suggested that the roles of these four defendants are inconsequential. That is true—but therein lies their precise value—their personal unimportance. They have been but little cogs in a vast and intricate machine . . . A worldwide spy network whose organized efficiency leaps all oceans and boundaries . . . A vicious network whose complex fabric weaves inevitably through the Naval Intelligence Offices in Bremen and Hamburg—through many German-American organizations here—through the War and Propaganda Ministries in Berlin to the inner sanctums of present Germany's highest officialdom . . .

338. Int. Berlin Office Med. Shot

very modern, very luxurious. At one end hangs a large silk swastika banner—at the other end a picture of Hitler. The whole side wall is a huge map of the world. A man stands with his back to CAMERA. Several men in the uniforms of high-ranking Nazis, including Von Eichen, Straubel and Huber, stand fac-

ing him. The Man speaks—and CAMERA SLOWLY MOVES IN to follow his finger.
MAN'S VOICE:

Our power increases from day to day. All of Europe is at our mercy, on its knees, begging us not to destroy it. Austria is part of Greater Germany. Czechoslovakia is through. Italy is with us and safeguards Jugo-Slavia. Japan is our ally. Hungary is practically ours. Our agents are succeeding in Rumania, Poland and Lithuania. Franco will soon have all Spain. France will be isolated from all sides.
(CONTINUED)

MAN'S VOICE:

(moves pointer to U.S.)
But now, since our glorious victory at Munich, all our efforts must be directed at the strongest remaining democracy—the United States. Here we must repair the few petty mistakes that have recently been made . . .

(points to South America)
In order to dominate completely the countries of South America—all excellent markets for our manufactured goods, all superb sources of raw materials—
(points to U.S.)

—we must paralyze the influence of the United States by using every instrument of propaganda at our command.—Furthermore we must know every military and naval secret it possesses. . . .

339. Insert Headlines

**"NAZI SPY CASE GOES TO JURY
TODAY!!
U.S. ATTORNEY KELLOG FINISHES
SUMMATION!"**

340. Int. Court Room Long Shot (Kellog in B.G.)

KELLOG:

. . . It has been suggested that the information these defendants have obtained for Germany is of small moment—but as we have endeavored to bring out during the course of this trial—we have only scratched the surface of the Nazi espionage network. We cannot calculate the extent of this spy-ring that has penetrated every nerve and tissue of this nation, together with its propaganda and religious hatred.
(picks up large chart)

Here, on this chart

341. Insert Chart

KELLOG:

(continuing—OVER chart)
. . . We can see the amazing system of sinister forces at work in this country. . . .
DISSOLVE THRU TO:

342. News Headlines

double exposed on chart, in b.g.
**NAZI SPIES FOUND GUILTY!
JURY CONVICTS GERMAN SPIES!
JUDGE TO PRONOUNCE SENTENCE!**
WIPE TO:

343e. Closeup Kellog

speaking directly into CAMERA.
KELLOG:

And some still say there is nothing to fear—that we are immune—that we are separated by vast oceans from the bacteria of aggressive Dictatorships and Totalitarian states. But we know, and have seen the mirror of history in Europe's last year.

343f. Montage Over Kellog's Closeup

Over Kellog's closeup, we see: Bund meetings—American Legion fight—Camp Horst Wessel meetings—drilling—pamphlet distribution—Hitler screaming—Kassel screaming, etc.

KELLOG:

And we know this bacteria can slowly poison the organism of our civilized society and dull its common sense and reason—working insidiously through its Bunds and training camps—where its spies take cover and where it diligently trains its youth to seize power. . . .

344. Superimposed Shots of American Bund Order Service

marching, are replaced by row on row of grim, robot-like German troops marching with full battle equipment

2. Pare Lorentz Assesses the Warner Brothers' Attack, 1939

If you needed to be convinced that we have a free screen, one look at *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* should convince you, because the Warner Brothers have declared war on Germany in this one. Although it is hysterical, vicious, ill-contrived, and peculiarly ambiguous, I do not object to the picture because it will be a notable one in many ways; a direct assault on the rulers of a foreign nation, a direct accusation of espionage in this country on the part of Germany, it at least is a political movie that pulls no punches. It is, however, wild-eyed in itself.

It is based on a series of articles written by a G-man who is not, I am told by officials, held in great repute by the Department of Justice, for whom he worked. It is further based on as fishy a trial as I ever read about—a trial that involved an army deserter

who wrote to a German newspaper, "I want to be a spy," and who copied military information out of a book he found in the New York Public Library. From the petty and almost burlesque facts of the trial, the Warners claim that the Germans are, through the German-American Bunds, attempting to organize a Nazi group in this country that eventually hopes to seize control of the government. . . .

[W]hether it annoys you or frightens you, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* is an important picture. From now on we should see some action on the screen; with this precedent there is no possible way any producer could argue against dramatizing any social or political theme on the grounds that he's afraid of domestic or foreign censorship. Everybody duck.

3. Walter Wanger and Alfred Hitchcock Call for Preparedness, 1940

. . . As Johnny steps up to the microphone, the announcer steps back out of picture. Johnny holds a manuscript in his hand, from which he reads:

JOHNNY:

(quietly, his eyes on the manuscript)

Hello, America. I have been watching a part of the world being blown to pieces. A part of the world as nice as Vermont and Ohio, Virginia, California and Illinois, lies ripped up and bleeding like a steer in a slaughter house.

Through the foregoing comes the sound of sirens. Johnny glances around a second towards where Carol is sitting, then continues above the noise.

JOHNNY:

And I've seen things that make the history of the savages read like Pollyanna legends. I've seen—

An official steps quickly forward to Johnny.

OFFICIAL:

(with a slight accent)

Pardon. They are coming. We will have to postpone the broadcast.

JOHNNY:

Postpone, my eye! Let's talk while we've still got a chance.

Carol has risen. She comes to stand beside him. The sound of the sirens increase.

ANOTHER FRENCH OFFICIAL:

The Nazis! The bombers! (to Carol) Madam, we have a shelter downstairs!

VARIOUS VOICES:

Lights out! They're in the sky! Out—downstairs, every one!

Johnny puts his arm around Carol.

JOHNNY:

How about it, Carol?

CAROL:

They're listening in America, Johnny.

The lights go out, leaving Johnny's and Carol's faces alone, dimly lit. Behind them we can hear the general exodus—various officials darting about, etc.

JOHNNY:

O. K., we'll tell 'em then.

He looks down at his manuscript, grins and throws it away. He turns back to the microphone.

JOHNNY:

I can't read the rest of the speech I had because all the lights have gone out so I'll have to just talk off the cuff. All that noise you hear isn't static. It's death

coming to Paris. Yes, they're coming here now. You can hear the bombs now, falling on the streets, cafes and homes. Don't tune me out. Hang on a while. This is a big story—and you're part of it. It's too late to do anything here except stand in the dark and let them come. It feels like all the lights are out everywhere—except in America. Keep those lights burning there.

Cover them with steel, ring them with guns. Build a canopy of battleships and bombing planes around them.—Hello, America! Hang onto your lights. They're the only lights left in the world!
FADE OUT.

THE END

4. A Friend Supports Wanger's Use of Propaganda in Films, 1940

129 Greenaway Rd.,
Eggertsville, N.Y.
Sept. 19, 1940

Dear Walter:

Glad to hear that you are reading THE EAGLES GATHER, and hope that they have awakened your enthusiasm, and the interest I also hope I aroused in you during our conversation in New York.

My wife and I saw FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT. You did an excellent job, and in Buffalo, at least, it was received with excitement and enthusiasm. The story is not only vital, but retains interest all along, reaching a fine patriotic climax.

True to your belief, the picture does more than deliver a mere message. It cannot be stressed too much these days. The idea that people may get tired

of propaganda is ridiculous. People like it if given to them in an entertaining form. Through that medium, not only will they listen, but will enjoy the message. It is therefore my belief that taking my suggestion as a lead, I am sure that joining THE EAGLES with DYNASTY, you will be able to produce a magnificent film which can stress the necessity for preparedness and rearmament. . . .

Sincerely,
Marcus Rebock

5. Burton K. Wheeler Takes Aim at Hollywood, 1941

UNITED STATES SENATE
Committee on Interstate Commerce

January 13, 1941

Mr. Will Hays
28 West 44th Street
New York City

My dear Mr. Hays:

I have just sent the following letter to Paramount News at Washington, D.C.:

" . . . The propaganda for war that is being waged by the motion picture companies of this coun-

try is reaching a point at which I believe legislation will have to be enacted regulating the industry in this respect unless the industry itself displays a more impartial attitude."

Many complaints are coming to me and to other members of Congress to the effect that the motion picture industry is carrying on a violent propaganda campaign intending to incite the American people to the point where they will become involved in this war.

As you well know, the motion picture and news reel is one of the great agencies for molding public opinion of this country and if we are going to preserve this nation as a democratic republic, it is highly essential that both sides of each question be presented.

I sincerely hope that you will call this to the atten-

tion of your people as I am fast coming to the conclusion that legislation should be enacted to remedy the present situation.

Yours respectfully,
(sgd) B. K. Wheeler

6. Gerald P. Nye Attacks Propaganda in Films, 1941

... To carry on propaganda you must have money. But you also must have the instruments of propaganda. And one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, instrument of propaganda is the movies. In Germany, Italy, and in Russia—the dictator countries—the government either owns or completely controls and directs the movies. And they are used as instruments of government propaganda. In this country the movies are owned by private individuals. But, it so happens that these movie companies have been operating as war propaganda machines almost as if they were being directed from a single central bureau.

We all go to the movies. We know how, for too long now, the silver screen has been flooded with picture after picture designed to rouse us to a state of war hysteria. Pictures glorifying war. Pictures telling about the grandeur and the heavenly justice of the British Empire. Pictures depicting the courage, the passion for democracy, the love of humanity, the tender solicitude for other people, by the generals and trade agents and the proconsuls of Great Britain, while all the peoples who are opposed to her, including even courageous little Finland now, are drawn as course, bestial, brutal scoundrels. . . .

Why do they do this? Well, because they are interested in foreign causes. You cannot doubt that. Go to Hollywood. It is a raging volcano of war fever. The place swarms with refugees. It also swarms with British actors. In Hollywood they call it the "British Army of Occupation." The leaders are almost all heavy contributors to the numerous committees of all sorts organized, under the guise of relief to Britain, Greece, or Russia, to propagandize us into war.

Why do they want to push us into war? Well, they have all sorts of interests. But here is one I can give you: One of the leading Wall Street investment

houses made a study of these movie industries only a few months ago. It told its clients that if Britain loses, seven of the eight leading companies will be wiped out. . . .

What I would like to know is this: Are the movie moguls doing this because they like to do it, or has the Government of the United States forced them to become the same kind of propaganda agencies that the German, Italian, and Russian film industries have become? I have excellent reason to believe that this governmental influence has prevailed. . . .

Americans, we want to be strong and ready always to effectively defend ourselves against the worst that any part of the world might choose to bring against us, of course. We want to leave no stone unturned that will aid in guaranteeing such a defense.

But, likewise, we ought to want freedom from foreign influence in times like these. Let's have courageous American thinking, not the kind which finds us waiting for the cue that Churchill gives; not the kind that has to be painted and pictured by propagandists or by forces whose profits are dependent upon foreign causes.

Let's be Americans because of and for causes that are American. Let us bury forever the thought that real Americanism is determined only by those who both hate Hitler most and love Britain best. Let us be giving larger thought to what is best for America. . . .

This is a wonderful hour for more America-first thinking; for a fine, clean expression by all our people of determination to stay out of these never-ending foreign wars, to keep faith with ourselves and with those who 150 years ago, won for us divorcement from the hates, the wars, and the power politics of Europe.

7. Wendell Willkie Defends Freedom of the Screen, 1941

Willkie, Owen, Otis & Bailly,
Washington, D.C., September 8, 1941.

United States Senator D. Worth Clark,
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.

My Dear Senator Clark: You are beginning an investigation of the motion-picture industry. My firm has been asked to represent it as counsel. We assume the charges against the industry are contained in Resolution 152, introduced in but not yet passed by the United States Senate, and in the speech of Senator Nye, coauthor of the resolution, which was delivered by him in St. Louis on the day the resolution was introduced.

After reading the resolution and Senator Nye's speech with care, I have come to the conclusion that your subcommittee intends to inquire whether or not the motion-picture industry, as a whole, and its leading executives, as individuals, are opposed to the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. If this is the case, there need be no investigation.

The motion-picture industry and its executives are opposed to the Hitler regime in Germany; they have watched with horror the destruction of a free life within Germany and the ruthless invasions of other countries by Nazis. On behalf of the motion-picture industry and its personnel, I wish to put on the record this simple truth: We make no pretense of friendliness to Nazi Germany nor to the objectives and goals of this ruthless dictatorship. We abhor everything which Hitler represents. . . .

Senator Nye, in his address, has also accused the industry of cooperating with the national administration on matters of national defense. . . .

Again, for the record, on behalf of the motion-picture industry and its personnel, may I put this simple truth: We are proud to admit that we have done everything possible to inform the public of the progress of the national-defense program.

The motion-picture industry has no wish to flout the authority or the position of your committee. But the industry has instructed me to say that it intends to continue to present to the American people a truthful and accurate portrayal of their defense effort. However, when Senator Nye says that the industry is doing this work on the demand of the administration, we emphatically and indignantly deny his charge. The administration has made no such demand, and frankly, the motion-picture industry

would be ashamed if it were not doing voluntarily what it is now doing in this patriotic cause. . . .

The resolution charges that the motion-picture business is in the hands of groups interested in involving the United States in war. The co-author, Senator Nye, explains this allegation on the basis of the individual opinions of the executives of the business, their racial and geographic backgrounds, and their mercenary motives. This charge should be supported by cold facts. We know that your committee will want to discuss only facts, so, in brief, I will present them for your record.

Of the more than 1,100 feature pictures produced since the outbreak of the present war, only some 50 have had anything to do with the issues involved in the war or with the ideological beliefs of the participants. Some of these 50, we are glad to admit, do portray nazi-ism for what it is—a cruel, lustful, ruthless, and cynical force. We know that this is an accurate portrayal of nazi-ism. . . .

The pictures portraying England and Germany do not purport to tell the American people what they should do about nazi-ism, save as the knowledge of the true facts may, as it always has, influence the judgment of right-thinking men and women. We believe that it is the truth which makes and keeps men free and that it is the suppression of the truth which is a menace to human liberty wherever it occurs. . . .

I cannot let pass this opportunity to warn of the very genuine dangers involved in the type of investigation which you are now proposing to start. The radio business is already included in the original resolution. From the motion picture and radio industries, it is just a small step to the newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals. And from the freedom of the press, it is just a small step to the freedom of the individual to say what he believes. The United States, with England and its allies, remain the bulwark of the rights of the individual in the world today. The rights of the individual mean nothing if freedom of the press and freedom of speech are destroyed. There can be no disunity within the United States on this principle, and I know there is none.

In conclusion, we insist that your committee is proceeding with doubtful legal authority in the conduct of the proposed hearings on the subjects contained in the original resolution and amplified in Sen-

ator Nye's speech. Furthermore, the manner of the committee's creation does not establish the impression of impartiality. And, as I have said above, the investigation and harassment of free expression in the United States, is a procedure, once accepted, that may

be applied to the theater, to newspapers and magazines, to the radio, to publications of all kinds and finally to the right of public officials and private citizens to speak freely. As American citizens, we protest this as vigorously as possible. . . .

Chapter 26:

Document Set 1 References

1. Warner Brothers Declares War on the German-American Bund, 1939
Milton Krims and John Wexley, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, Script, 1939 (Including Revisions), in John Wexley Papers, Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Box 1.
2. Pare Lorentz Assesses the Warner Brothers' Attack, 1939
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"Shooting Script," June 5, 1940, *Foreign Correspondent*, in Walter Wanger Papers, Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Box 78.
4. A Friend Supports Wanger's Use of Propaganda in Films, 1940
Marcus Rebeck to Walter Wanger, September 19, 1940, in Wanger Papers, Box 77.
5. Burton K. Wheeler Takes Aim at Hollywood, 1941
Burton K. Wheeler to Will Hays, January 13, 1941, in United Artists Collection, Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Monroe Greenthal File, Box 4.
6. Gerald P. Nye Attacks Propaganda in Films, 1941.
Gerald P. Nye, "Our Madness Increases as Our Emergency Shrinks," Extension of Remarks of Hon. Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota in the Senate of the United States, Monday, August 4, 1941, in Gerald P. Nye Papers, West Branch, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Box 58.
7. Wendell Willkie Defends Freedom on the Screen, 1941
Wendell Willkie to D. Worth Clark, September 8, 1941, in United States Congress, Senate, *Propaganda in Motion Pictures, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, United States Senate*, 77th Cong., 1st session, pp. 18-21.