

## Extending the History Curriculum: Exploring World War II Victors, Vanquished, and Occupied Using European Film

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THE AVERAGE AMERICAN student has, in one form or another, experienced the “thrill” of victory and “agony” of defeat. Whether it is winning a soccer game, losing a board game, or coming from behind to overtake an opponent in a video game, most students are familiar with the concepts of victory and defeat. However, the safe confines of sports or home entertainment do not provide students with a deep or nuanced understanding of these concepts—an understanding that to win or lose, to be the victor or the vanquished, is not as simple as game-driven euphoria or disappointment suggests.

War is one place where the complexity of victory and defeat should be explored more deeply. Unfortunately, war—whether experienced directly as a soldier in Afghanistan or a Syrian in an Aleppo suburb, or indirectly through a news item on the Internet or American television—is a near inescapable aspect of most people’s daily life. Yet unless you’ve “been in a war,” it is difficult to know what it is actually like and what meanings are created from the experience. Further, each armed conflict is so unique in its context, events, and issues, that these meanings can vary widely depending on whom you ask.

Thankfully, few students in contemporary American history classes have experienced war directly, but a perusal of social studies and history curricula across America indicates an expectation that students will learn

about many wars during their school years—the Crusades, the Seven Years War, the Revolutionary War, the American Civil War, and the World Wars are just a few examples. One might ask why a country that espouses a dedication to peace makes war such a central aspect of its social studies and history curricula? As a response, it could be noted that students learn about various wars to gain insight into how people come to create cultural communities; how nations are formed, reformed, and sometimes eliminated altogether; how power can be exercised through violence and repression; and how rights can and have been achieved and defended through conflict. Further, students also learn about war to explore cultural perspectives on duty, courage, loyalty, honor, rebellion, betrayal, cruelty, compassion, survival, and resilience. To these ends, the history teacher will undoubtedly have students identify the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of particular conflicts. But much of the powerful learning beyond these rudimentary understandings may be found in explorations of the actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values of those who have experienced war to get a sense of how war feels and how it affects people’s lives. In short, this entails an investigation of what war means to people during, as well as after, the conflict.

In this article, we consider how teachers can extend the social studies or history curriculum through the use of cinema in order to engage students in a deeper understanding of and empathy with those who have experienced war and its aftermath. Specifically, this study examines five European films (created between 1945 and 1958) and offers for consideration lesson ideas that can be employed to contemplate individuals’ actions surrounding World War II. A British film from the era is used as an entry point to considering the viewpoint of the so-called “victors” while German films are used to reflect on the “vanquished”. A third viewpoint is also examined, that of nations that were “occupied.” Here, French and Italian films are employed to mine the experiences of those living where victory and defeat were less clear-cut.<sup>1</sup> Finally, connections to national and global narratives are also suggested.

### **Film as Pedagogy**

As early as 1913, inventor of the motion picture Thomas Edison boldly stated in an interview with the *New York Daily Mirror*:

Books will soon be obsolete in the public schools. Scholars will be instructed through the eye. It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed inside of ten years.<sup>2</sup>

While this prediction proved to be somewhat premature, it did express popular enthusiasm for a medium that would endure and expand over the

course of the twentieth century. By the 1940s, the use of film projectors was widely promoted by Departments of Education, and soon became another arrow in the teacher's resource quiver. Presently, it would not be an exaggeration to say that a vast majority of teachers within the country use some form of visual media on a regular basis to complement more traditional forms of pedagogy (of course, the old 16mm projector has now been largely replaced with television screens, smart boards, data projectors, and other devices). Jeremy Stoddard and Alan Marcus placed it at once a week.<sup>3</sup> In a recent survey, one researcher went so far as to indicate that using film to teach the Holocaust was just as effective as inviting a survivor to speak as a guest lecturer.<sup>4</sup>

However, until recently, the uses of this medium were closely monitored and curtailed: films in the classroom were principally relegated to instructional films that attempted to give detached and objective details of elements within subject-centered courses—although the “objectivity” of these films has been severely challenged by recent scholarship.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the “showing of movies” in the classroom has had a fair share of detractors who see little educational worth for students and only a time-filler for teachers.<sup>6</sup> Or worse, historians have shown that historical films, often inaccurate, can have a strong influence on a student's understanding of and outlook on certain historical events.<sup>7</sup>

In order to break away from this dichotomy that seems to have existed since the birth of film, creative educators and scholars have realized that the issue at stake here is not the medium itself, but in finding more inventive and sophisticated ways to incorporate it into the curriculum.<sup>8</sup> With the belief that cinema has strong possibilities for drawing students into a closer connection with the object of study, researchers of social studies and history education have led the movement to consider film an effective resource for teaching about content, people, and events from the past.<sup>9</sup> Beyond mere transmission of facts, it has been shown that with proper caution and consideration, this popular medium can engage students in higher learning processes such as applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating material,<sup>10</sup> and offer perspectives that may counter-balance dominant narratives.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, William Russell points out that there are multiple ways that film can be incorporated into the curriculum. Classroom-tested and found to be effective in his own experience, Russell specifically enumerated five methodologies,<sup>12</sup> all with pertinence to the present study:

**1) Film as a Visual Textbook:** Presently, of the teachers using film in the classroom, an overwhelming majority of them use it simply as a means to reach visual learners, to interest them in an event, or to depict a particular time period. This method has been roundly criticized by most researchers

in this field, especially when a teacher approaches it with the belief that a film can impartially portray the past, and that little counterbalancing discussion is needed.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, some historians have argued that with judicious choice and cropping for classroom use, a reasonably accurate interpretation of certain past events can be maintained.<sup>14</sup> As an example of this fairly unbiased reportage, Russell points to Richard Attenborough's award-winning film *Gandhi* (1982).<sup>15</sup>

**2) Film as a Depicter of Atmosphere:** Robert Toplin remarks that because of competition to win the audience's attention, filmmakers do not have the luxury to present complete interpretations of the past on the screen.<sup>16</sup> However, many may have the budgets to create elaborate sets. For this reason, "movies about the past often provide an emotional hook that pulls audiences' interest toward a study of the subject... Movies give audiences a feeling for life in a distant time and place."<sup>17</sup> Rather than focusing on events, therefore, a teacher may choose to use a film as a way to depict the constructed reality of certain periods of time. By using a well-chosen set of short clips, a teacher may be able to "show students architecture, living conditions, clothes and weapons of different historical periods."<sup>18</sup> Without entering the plots or detailing historical inaccuracies, Russell points out how a teacher could use films like *Marie Antoinette* (2006) or *Gladiator* (2000) to merely put the viewer in touch with the general economic rift between, for example, royalty and commoners.

**3) Film as an Analogy:** Rather than being concerned with historical accuracy, teachers may use films with themes, events, or human interactions that are similar to what are being studied in a history class. Through the use of analogy, teachers can help students tap into higher-order thinking skills, and transcend the rift between past and present situations. Here, Russell points to the science fiction movie *Planet of the Apes* (1968) as an opening to a discussion of racism.<sup>19</sup> This method was also promoted by Robert Rosenstone, who argues that film represents a new visual culture that may change our relationship with the past much like the written word challenged the older oral culture. As such, historical movies should not "provide literal truths... but symbolic or metaphorical ones."<sup>20</sup>

**4) Film as a Historiography:** Russell comments that this is perhaps the most underutilized methodology of the five.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, it has great importance for the present project. He argues:

Artifacts (like films) created during a time period can be a valuable resource; for example, many contemporary films portray relevant issues in current society. So in 10 or 20 years a student could use a film created during this time to understand what issues were relevant during the 2010s. One would easily see the relevant issues of terrorism, the Middle East conflict,

environmentalism, war, same-sex marriage, and so on. This can be done with any time period.<sup>22</sup>

Here, he refers specifically to *12 Angry Men* (1957). A pioneer in film history, John O'Connor long supported this argument for the study of “moving image documents” (or historical films) in the classroom, specifically pertaining to the content they contain, the context of their production and the reception society gave them upon their release.<sup>23</sup>

**5) Film as a Springboard:** Finally, Russell reasons that film clips may be inserted into a class simply to rouse a student’s interest in an event. Opposing clips may be played side by side to start up a discussion on an issue, forcing students to take sides on the film’s motives and biases, providing a means to introduce a historical debate. Here, Russell argues that the film *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) could be used as a catalyst to discuss communism, governmental power, media, and individual rights.<sup>24</sup> Metzger supports this premise, arguing that movies invariably choose specific perspectives of the past to portray, and then shoehorn the audience into sympathy with an artificially created protagonist.<sup>25</sup> However, reality is not so simple. As a basis for classroom discussion, he points out, “more rigorous learning requires that a film-based lesson help students to consider the ways in which the movie simplifies or complicates the viewer’s understandings of people and events in the past in light of our contemporary society and values.”<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of the methodology or methodologies chosen, one distinct conclusion emerges from the research literature: if one chooses to use film as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, it must be done in a purposeful way. Specifically, in a social studies or history course, the teacher must clarify what will be accomplished through the use of film study, and how it is tied to the larger goals of the curriculum. First and foremost, it requires an intimate knowledge of each chosen film on the part of the teacher, and/or a precise choice of the excerpts being shown.<sup>27</sup> As well, Scott Metzger reasons, a solid plan must be constructed in order to shepherd the goals of the lesson along:

To support student learning, teachers need to guide students’ viewing of a film toward particular ends and to be prepared to address questions students may ask such as: Did things really happen the way they were shown in the movie? Was it accurate or made up? Historical literacy involves more than just being concerned about the accuracy of details, so teachers also need to be prepared to help students recognize and evaluate the messages the film contains about the past, the people in it, and how those relate to our world today. Achieving this kind of learning in the classroom requires purposeful support instruction by the teacher, which requires outside research on the film’s topic and themes.<sup>28</sup>

## Choices and Challenges in Using Film in the Classroom

Films are usually created, first and foremost, as vehicles of entertainment to engage the viewer in a journey of imagination. They stimulate the affective aspect of our personalities to experience joy, anger, happiness, fear, compassion, and revulsion. This does not mean that films cannot also be informative and intellectually engaging—if used effectively in the proper context. There is no denying that films are their own kind of historical document. As Marcus, Metzger, Paxton, and Stoddard state:

A history film in the classroom can serve as one “text” or piece of evidence, to support particular student learning outcomes—possibly through presenting or covering certain content knowledge, possibly by presenting specific narratives or interpretations about the past to be analyzed or critiqued, possibly by eliciting moral and ethical reactions, or stimulating historical thinking about how the past relates to the world today. Exactly how a film supports student learning outcomes depends entirely on the intentions the teacher has for its classroom use.<sup>29</sup>

Once the overall goals are established and contextualized within the curriculum, the first question often asked by teachers is: What film(s) should I use? The answer involves obtaining information about historical films with potentially relevant themes. An Internet search will unearth numerous thematic lists of historical films for initial consideration. For the more scholastically minded, the journal *Film & History* and books such as *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* and *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context* offer in-depth analyses of history related films.<sup>30</sup>

A closely associated question is: How do I use a film effectively in the classroom? The answer to that question is addressed herein, but teachers are encouraged to read further. Education-oriented journals such as *The Social Studies* and *The History Teacher* offer a number of articles on the classroom use of history movies. Books such as *Great Films and How to Teach Them* and *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies*<sup>31</sup> also provide interesting classroom suggestions.

Once a thematically relevant historical film has been found, the almost inevitable next question is: Is this a “good” or “bad” film? This question is almost always tied to concerns about historical accuracy. Historical accuracy is important, particularly if the film is meant to convey basic factual information to students. However, all films, even those deemed to be largely accurate, invariably include fictionalized elements for purposes of narrative flow, entertainment value, or time limitations. Some include more fiction than others, but that does not mean that *Schindler's List* (a 1993 film based on a true story and highly regarded for its stark, but largely

accurate portrayal of concentration camps) should be used in the classroom, while a film such as *Life is Beautiful* (a successful 1997 comedy-drama concerning an Jewish-Italian man and son's internment in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, but criticized for inaccuracies and incorporation of comedic elements against the backdrop of the Holocaust) should not. The choice of whether to use a film depends on the intended learning outcomes teachers identify. However, it is expeditious to say that film should never be viewed as a complete replacement for other historically accurate sources, but instead work in concert with or serve as a supplement to other classroom resources. The films included in this article are all fictionalized in general storyline, but are largely accurate as to time, place, and settings. Indeed, one film was filmed on the rubble-strewn streets of Berlin, while another was shot in the hills of Sicily using local townspeople. Both rejected studio soundstages for local flavor.

A related question to whether a film is “good” or “bad” is: How is the past presented? This question concerns the density of the narrative. If the storylines are overly muddy or too complex, making the film inaccessible to the audience, educational purposes can be negated. Likewise, a film that is era-bound (e.g., a sixties movie showing mini-skirts on medieval palace courtiers), involves archaic acting styles (e.g., theatricality common in early “talkies”), and overreliance on idiomatic linguistic patterns (e.g., American slang in a film on the Russian Revolution of 1917) can elicit laughter and ridicule while undermining educational goals. The films chosen for this article are contemporary to their times (i.e., post-World War II). The narrative is largely accessible and portions that are overly complex can be addressed through additional information provided by the teacher.

Also of concern is whether to show the entire film or selected clips. Each choice comes with its advantages and disadvantages. Showing the entire film permits character development and the opportunity for the viewer to relate to the characters and engage with the subject. It also takes a significant amount of class time to complete the showing, and means that historical inaccuracies have to be addressed to ensure inaccurate information is not being conveyed. By contrast, showing selected clips addresses time constraints and offers a certain amount of control over the content, but the cohesiveness of the narrative suffers—as does the opportunity to engage or empathize with the characters. To compensate, teachers will have to “bridge the gaps” by inserting narrative summaries to assist students in maintaining focus and garnering meaning from what can appear like random snippets of life. For the lesson ideas contained in this article, we chose to use short film excerpts only. It was deemed unnecessary to show an entire film in order to extend students conceptual understanding of victor, vanquished, and occupied. The time that would

have been spent watching an entire film is much better used relating understandings to historically accurate and relevant individual, national, and global narratives.

Also of concern for teachers is whether or not to use black and white films. Some teachers shy away from using black and white film entirely, viewing it as anachronistic to today's students. There is no question that in a visual culture familiar with high-definition and three-dimensional imagery found on television and in movies or video games, color film is preferable. It helps the viewer to relate to the imagery, viewing people and events as "real." However, black and white film, used appropriately, does offer unique opportunities. It conveys to the viewer that the film is a historical "text," that you are entering a moment in the past—a time when technologies were less sophisticated, when people still lived lives rich in drama and emotion, and when decisions were made that had implications for the people of the time and in many cases for us today. Further, crossing the precipice into the world of the black and white film is a symbolic traveling into the past. It is a world similar to ours, yet different. A skilled teacher can help students enter into this world and make meaning from the similarities and differences. For the purposes of this article, we have chosen to use five European films, all black and white. The reasons are logistical and cinematic. First, few color films were made in Europe immediately following World War II (save for a few British comedies). In order to obtain insights into the post-war experiences using visual media, one is forced to consider black and white photographs or films. Second, cinematically, black and white lends itself to the stark topics being discussed. War and its aftermath are harsh—"black and white" visually conveys this. Likewise, the concepts being explored are being problematized—moving from neat definitions to ones layered with unease. For students used to a world that is vibrantly colored, the unease they will feel watching black and white film is rather fitting.

Finally, a similar point can be made about the use of foreign language films. Asking students to watch an entire film in a foreign language might be overly taxing, leading to distraction and boredom, but the selected use of foreign language clips can effectively suggest to students that this film is "of" the culture under study. For example, a historical movie about the Napoleonic Wars shot in French or a movie about Che Guevara shot in Spanish offers a heightened sense of authenticity. This does not mean that the clips should be viewed uncritically, but does suggest that filmmakers are more likely to have homegrown cultural perspectives. Four of the five films used in this article are non-English speaking with two being German, one being French, and one being Italian. However, all are available with English subtitles. This choice was deemed appropriate as hearing a German

soldier or an Italian villager speak in their native language actually serves to draw the viewer into their story. It “feels” real.

Regardless of the films to be shown in the social studies or history classroom, teachers must guide students in their viewing. One cannot assume students know how to critically watch a film and will attend to what we might believe is an “obvious” point. Clear instructions on what to attend to, possibly the taking of notes describing settings, identifying characters, relating interactions, or recording lines spoken, is essential for maximizing post-viewing activities.

### The Films

The following films, summarized below, were used as the bases in this article to explore the concepts of victor, vanquished, and occupied in a senior-level history course. Teachers are encouraged to watch these films, research them further, and assess their overall usefulness in meeting their educational and curricular goals.

***The Blue Lamp (1950)*** A British crime film, released in 1950 by Ealing Studios, is directed by Basil Dearden and stars Jack Warner (as P.C. George Dixon), Jimmy Hanley (as P.C. Andy Mitchell), and Dirk Bogarde (as Tom Riley). Set in the Paddington Green area of London a few years after World War II, Dixon, a career-constable nearing retirement, takes new recruit Mitchell under his wing. When Riley, a young hoodlum on the run for his crimes, guns down Dixon, Mitchell sets out to track down Riley and bring him to justice.

***Stalingrad: Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever? (1958)*** Directed by Frank Wisbar and starring Joachim Hansen (as Lt. Wisse), Wolfgang Priess (as Major Linkmann), Carl Lange (as General Friedrich Paulus), and Sonja Ziemann (as Katia), this West German film relates the story of the siege of Stalingrad from a German perspective. Young *Wehrmacht* officer Wisse is sent to the front as a liaison officer to the Romanian Army, where he encounters rigid commanding officer, Major Linkmann. Tensions between the two rise as Wisse philosophically opposes Linkmann’s single-minded adherence to duty and dismissive attitude to their Romanian allies and fellow German soldiers. As the Red Army encircles the German forces, they retreat into Stalingrad only to find conditions becoming increasingly desperate and reinforcements not forthcoming. In an effort to save himself, Linkmann tries to abandon his men only to be shot as a traitor. Eventually, the German forces surrender and are marched to a Soviet POW camp.

***The Murderers Among Us (1946)*** Perhaps the most well-known *trümmerfilm* or “rubble film” emerging out of the ruins of World War II Germany, director Wolfgang Staudte’s masterpiece stars Ernst Wilhelm

Borchert (as Dr. Hans Mertens), Hildegard Knef (as Suzanne Wallner), and Arno Paulsen (as Ferdinand Brückner). Filmed on location in the war-torn streets of 1945 Berlin, the story centers on traumatized military doctor Mertens and concentration camp survivor Wallner, who have returned to Berlin to “pick up the pieces” of their lives. Upon crossing paths with Brückner, his former commander, Mertens resolves to rectify his and Germany’s horrific war crimes by killing him on Christmas Eve. Unfortunately, absolution doesn’t come so easily.

***Manon* (1949)** Based on Abbé Prévost’s novel *L’histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon* (1731) and subsequent operas *Manon Lescaut* (1856) and *Manon* (1884), this French film is directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot and stars Michel Auclair (as Robert Dégrioux), Cécile Aubrey (as Manon), and Serge Reggianni (as Leon Lescaut). Set in France immediately after the end of World War II, Robert Dégrioux is a former French resistance fighter who saves Manon from a lynching by villagers who believe her to have been a Nazi collaborator during the occupation. Dégrioux takes Manon to Paris, where they fall into a downward spiral of profiteering, prostitution, and murder.

***Paisa* (1946)** An episodic Italian film from neo-realist director Roberto Rossellini, the vignettes begin with the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 and, similar to the Allied forces, progress up through Italy, confronting occupying Nazis and various Italian military factions and civilians along the way. The sixth and final vignette sees the Allies in northern Italy in December 1944, still dealing with injustices inflicted on the Italian people by retreating German forces.

### **Exploring World War II Victors, Vanquished, and Occupied using European Film**

The following are a series of lesson ideas that draw on a number of methodologies, most notably Russell’s *Film as a Historiography* and *Film as a Springboard*. Teachers are encouraged to critique, revise, and apply as needed. These ideas are not intended to be fully developed lesson plans, but illustrations of how a teacher might use these films, and film generally, to extend students’ conceptual development. As always, overall educational purposes and curricular contextualization must be considered and established. We envision these ideas being incorporated at the conclusion of a unit on World War II or as a transition or introduction to a unit on the post-World War II era.

**Victors:** Victory in Europe, or V-E Day, was a public holiday declared to celebrate the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany. Celebrated on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 in the United States and the countries of

the Commonwealth and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May in Europe, the streets of Allied nations across the globe filled with cheering people, reveling in the end of a multi-year nightmare that saw the death and wounding of 60 to 85 million people. Victory in Europe is often taught in schools using images of ticker-tape parades, dancing people in the streets, and the erroneous showing of Alfred Eisenstaedt's celebratory Victory in Japan, or V-J Day, photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square. But there is more to the story of "victory" than this.

The concept of victory is not likely to be new to students. Most of them have, at one time or another, experienced the exhilaration of winning a sporting competition, or a video or board game. Teachers versed in conceptual development can begin this exploration by connecting with what students already know. Through guided questioning, teachers can relate personal experiences to the excitement, happiness, and pride British people felt on V-E Day, perhaps using celebratory photographs to illustrate the point. However, just like the day after the party when you have to clean up the mess left behind, Britain had to face the post-victory world. What realities of life would they have to confront? What was "victory" really like and how did the British learn to "live the peace"? Through question and answer, as well as the strategic use of photographs of bombed-out London, Manchester, and Liverpool, students can come to realize that the physical damage also includes emotional and spiritual damage that afflicted a fair number of British people in the years following. Pride and excitement quickly turned to "what now?" and "who am I?" and "who are we as British people?"

This sense of bewilderment and anxiety about the future is one of the most interesting aspects of a post-war victory. People often experience a deep sense of being "lost" and "out of sorts." Through the use of poetry, literature, and film, students can begin to feel what some have called the malaise that set in the aftermath of World War II. This sentiment pervaded a number of British films in the post-World War II era, including *The Blue Lamp* (1950). Of particular interest is a short, seven-minute clip from the film in which Tom Riley, a young hoodlum, conveys to the audience his philosophy about getting ahead in life. He believes that following the rules is for fools and the only way to make it—to be a "somebody"—is to take what you want, by force if necessary. In a world of rubble-filled streets, rising unemployment, rationed foodstuffs, and little hope, is Tom Riley's take on life so difficult to understand? Students in the process of formulating their identities and perhaps feeling a sense of angst about who they are and where they fit can relate to this desire to be a "somebody." Whether it is having the right clothes, listening to "cool" music, being seen with the right friends, or participating in socially acceptable activities,

students strongly wish to find their place—to stop being lost and be found. By suggesting to students that entire nations can collectively experience a sense of disorientation following a major upheaval helps them understand that they, individually, are not so different from everyone else. However, finding oneself involves making wise choices. Ultimately, Tom Riley falls prey to impulsivity, whereas the British people endured. Slowly, as buildings, roads, and services were rebuilt, the entire population found its way to a new future—a future without an Empire, but increasingly connected to its European and North American allies.

**Vanquished:** V-E Day not only signaled victory for the Allies in Europe, it cast Germany in the role of defeated power. When President Karl Donitz, successor to Adolf Hitler, signed the German Instrument of Surrender in Reims, France, what was known as Victory in Europe Day became *Tag der Kapitulation* or Day of Capitulation in Germany. There was no dancing in the streets, no parades, and no celebratory pictures. The Germans were a vanquished people.

The term “vanquished” may be unfamiliar to some students, but they will certainly have heard or used the synonym “defeated.” Again, beginning with what students know, teachers can begin to explore what it means to lose a war. Using photographs of bombed-out Berlin, Hamburg, and Dresden, teachers can ask what the German people might have been feeling on learning that the war was over. While some might imagine that defeat correlates to sadness, frustration, and anger, in Germany these feelings mixed with feelings of happiness, relief, guilt, and shame. It is in this cauldron of conflicting emotions that one begins to understand what it is like to move into the future as a vanquished people. Using diary excerpts, magazine articles, paintings, and poetry, teachers can begin an exploration of Germany as a vanquished people. The final six minutes of the German-language film *Stalingrad: Dogs Do You Want to Live Forever?* (1958) is of particular interest here. Following Germany’s defeat at the hands of the Soviets in 1943, the German soldiers begin to understand that blindly following orders has resulted in nothing but nonsensical destruction, starvation, and despair. As the German soldiers are marched to a Soviet prisoner of war (POW) camp and a very uncertain future, a low-ranking infantryman asks the German reverend, “What will happen?” The sanguine religious figure replies, “I don’t know, but we’ll have enough time to find out. Maybe we’ll learn something—or maybe not.” In this short clip, you have a hint of self-reflection beginning—a journey to understand how the war happened, what part each individual and the nation collectively played in unleashing untold death and destruction.

Self-reflection is one thing. but for many Germans, an overwhelming sense of guilt set in—so much so that many Germans refused to speak of

the war in the years following. However, in the immediate post-war period, there was no escaping what had happened. American occupation soldiers marshaled Germans into movie theatres to show them film footage of Nazi concentration camps, and forced locals to visit nearby camps to bury the dead. Each German soldier and civilian had to consider his or her own complicity in wartime atrocities while the society as a whole wondered if, collectively, it was responsible for its own downfall. To explore this point further, show students the last ten minutes of the German-language film *Murderers Among Us* (1946). Here, Dr. Mertens plans to murder his former commander on Christmas Eve, 1945. Mertens believes that by “murdering the past,” he can free himself from his own guilt and find a kind of absolution from his own sin of complicity. As the film climaxes, Dr. Mertens moves in to finish off Commander Brückner only to have Suzanne intervene, encouraging the doctor to let the authorities handle punishments for war crimes. Through guided questioning, the teacher can help students understand that this was a cinematic effort to convey the need to re-establish order, to begin following civilized laws again, to eschew vigilantism, and to permit the courts to dispense justice. As well, students may note that murdering Brückner will neither release Mertens from his shame nor absolve him of his responsibility, and will make him no better than the symbol of his pain and torture. In the end, the film suggests that his future lies with the still struggling but wise Suzanne.

Each German who lived through the Nazi era embarked on their own personal journey to deal with their experiences and the actions of their nation. Some Germans chose to confront the past directly, taking responsibility for themselves and their country’s behavior; some wallowed in guilt for years; others retreated into denials of any wrongdoing; and still others focused only on the future, refusing to deal with the past. These film excerpts give a sense of the experience of some Germans during the post-war period, establishing a continuing subtext to the Cold War narrative of Germany’s division into democratic and capitalist West Germany and communist East Germany.

**Occupied:** Every nation in Europe—save Great Britain and neutral Sweden, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Spain, Portugal, and Andorra—were occupied by Axis soldiers at some point during World War II. Having your territorial sovereignty violated and government fall, only to be replaced by foreign rulers or a locally derived puppet government beholden to the occupiers ignites a multi-layered response from the citizens of the occupied nation. Questions about how to act, how to speak, what to believe, and whom to trust, shape every thought and movement of the citizenry. Shall I quietly resist or actively confront the invaders? Shall I collaborate with the occupiers or become an apologist for their actions? In the occupied

countries of Europe, the answers framed understandings of hero, traitor, denier, martyr, and survivor during the war and for decades following war's end. In this section, we consider films from two nations who endured occupation in World War II—France and Italy. In France, the French endured four years of German occupation in the north and four years of a pro-German French administration in the south. Some people resisted, some collaborated, some simply survived any way they knew how.

Of the three concepts to be explored, the concept of occupation and what it means is probably the most difficult for students to relate to. Few students have had experiences that are easily relatable. However, students do have some sense of what it feels like to have something of their own, only to have it taken away from them. Whether it is a brother or sister taking their prized possession to play with without permission or suddenly having to share living space with a new sibling or visiting relative or friend, students can imagine the feelings associated with such “injustice”—to have their rights, their ability to make choices, restricted or negated. Teachers can ask students what they imagine it means to live under military occupation. Indeed, have them imagine how they might respond if the soldiers of a foreign nation invaded America, their hometown, their house. Suggest to students that in the face of invasion and occupation answers are neither clear nor simple.

Using maps, documentaries, and literature excerpts to review the extent of Axis occupation of Europe during World War II, students can begin to understand the ambiguity that comes with living under occupation and re-adjusting when liberation eventually arrives. Show students the ten-minute film clip of the French-language film *Manon* (1949), whereby the title character is accused of being a Nazi collaborator and nearly has her head shaved by villagers in Normandy. Eventually, she is rescued, but is taken prisoner by a French soldier whom she seduces in order to escape. *Manon* is a woman who has learned to survive by her wits. She quickly assesses the situation—who has the power and who does not—and acts accordingly to survive and sometimes thrive. Ask students what the difference is between being a collaborator (the villagers view of *Manon*) and being a survivor (*Manon*'s view of herself). Did she deserve to have her head shaven or be imprisoned? Why or why not?

Flash forward to the present, which in the film is 1949. Show students the ten-minute film clip of *Manon* self-indulgently satisfying her desires by engaging with the black market and working as a prostitute. Why is she doing this? She seems to be symbolically saying to the world “I suffered, therefore I deserve to have what I want no matter what.” Is this an adequate explanation for behavior that many would consider immoral? How does her war experience of living/surviving under Nazi occupation in France inform

her worldview and actions? Suggest to students that, in many ways, Manon has moved from just surviving to trying to (re)establish her sense of pride following years of humiliation. A parallel can be drawn with France itself. Viewed as a proud European power by one and all before World War II, it fell to the Nazis in six weeks in 1940. Humiliated by the defeat and scorned by many who opined it as reflective of a national character flaw, France felt a need to reassert itself in the post-World War II era—to rediscover a sense of national pride. Serving as one of the four occupying powers of a defeated Germany, a charter member of the United Nations and permanent member on the UN Security Council, charter member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and inspiration for the future European Union, France redefined itself as a nation of influence far beyond what might be expected of a nation that spent four years under Nazi occupation.

Another impact of occupation, one that lingers afterward, concerns the uncertainty of whom to trust. Living in constant fear for your life, trying your best to survive in difficult conditions, it becomes difficult to ascertain who is a friend and who is an enemy. In Italy, the north was occupied by Nazi Germany following the deposition of fascist Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in 1943. Italy was also invaded from the south by the Allied powers. American, British, Canadian, and Australian forces sought to create a second front against Germany and “liberate” Italy in the process. With fascist Italian forces also engaged in a civil war with partisan Italians loyal to the King, knowing who was friend or foe was very difficult. This is a theme that is very prominent in the first vignette of the Italian-language film *Paisa* (1946). Have students watch the first eight minutes of the vignette. Alert them to pay attention to the interaction between the Italian villagers and the American soldiers. How do the villagers respond to the American soldiers? Initially, they are unsure if the Americans are actually returning Germans, and later are unsure if they are trustworthy. Continue watching the vignette, having students note the interactions between Joe—the American soldier—and Carmela—the Italian village girl. How does Carmela initially view Joe? (Answers may include: She views him suspiciously as she says, “You’re all alike!—You, the Germans, the Fascists.”) How do Joe and Carmela eventually bridge their “trust gap”? (Answers may include: He talks to her, telling her his name and asking her hers. He shows her a picture of his family—he establishes a connection, allowing her to think of her own missing family members. Slowly, Carmela begins to view Joe as a friend, someone like herself.) Highlight that for a mistrustful people who have lived under occupation, the establishment of connection and the beginnings of trust are important for cultivating widespread support, particularly in a situation where the locals have diverse political sympathies.

The concept of trust transcends the experience of occupation, however. Joe and Carmela's growing trust and friendship (paralleling liberator U.S. and liberated Italy) is undermined by the intervention of a third party, the returning Germans. German soldiers kill Joe, but when his fellow American soldiers find Joe's body, they assume it was Carmela who killed him, unaware the Germans have returned and are lurking about while waiting to re-establish their hold on the village. Unfortunately, Carmela cannot defend herself as the Germans take her prisoner and eventually murder her as well.

These film excerpts not only illustrate the challenges of (re)establishing trust following an occupation, but also are also illustrative of future challenges to be faced throughout the Cold War. As teachers transition into a study of the Cold War, it will undoubtedly be noted that relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, allies during World War II, would quickly turn adversarial. There are multiple reasons for this—ideological differences, jostling for geopolitical influence, and economic rivalry—but at its core was a deep-seeded mistrust. For the next forty-five years, the United States—along with its western allies Great Britain, France, (West) Germany, and Italy—viewed the Soviet Union with great suspicion. The reverse was also true. Some teachers might wish to note that this Cold War sentiment seemingly continues to inform U.S.-Russian relations today.

### Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, we posited that understanding the post-World War II era in Europe requires a sophisticated and nuanced sense of what it means to be the victor, the vanquished, and the occupied in war. This article suggests teachers can extend the social studies and history curricula by exploring these concepts within the context of Europe's post-World War II experience. Drawing on Russell's *Film as Historiography* and *Film as a Springboard* methodologies, lesson ideas are included using excerpts from selected British, German, French, and Italian films, while connections to individual, national, and global narratives are made.

To be sure, film should not replace historically accurate primary and secondary sources. But if taken as a piece of text to be analyzed and interpreted in context, critiqued in its construction, and thoughtfully used as a vehicle to create meaningful historical understandings, film has its place in the social studies and history classroom.

## Notes

1. It must be noted that Eastern European films were considered for this article, particularly *The Cranes Are Flying* (1958) from the Soviet Union and *The Last Stand* (1947) from Poland. However, it was decided that Eastern European war and post-war experiences, which often entailed victory, defeat, and occupation, as well as their cinematic expression in film, were sufficiently complex to deserve consideration in a separate article.
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3. Jeremy D. Stoddard and Alan S. Marcus, "The Burden of Historical Representation: Race, Freedom, and 'Educational' Hollywood Film," *Film and History* 36, no. 1 (2006): 26-35.
4. Mary Beth Donnelly, "Educating Students about the Holocaust: A Survey of Teaching Practices," *Social Education* 70, no. 1 (2006): 51-54.
5. See Jessamyn Neuhaus, "'Shake This Square World and Blast off for Kicksville': Teaching History with Post-WWII Prescriptive Classroom Films," *The History Teacher* 44, no. 1 (November 2010): 35-50; Jeremy D. Stoddard "The Ideological Implications of Using 'Educational' Film to Teach Controversial Events," *Curriculum Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (2009): 407-433; Paul Warmington, Angel Van Gorp, and Ian Grosvenor, "Education in Motion: Uses of Documentary Film in Educational Research," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 47, no. 4 (2011): 457-472.
6. See Walter Ulrich, "The Use of Fiction as a Source of Information about Interpersonal Communication: A Critical View," *Communication Quarterly* 34 (1986): 143-153; James VanOosting, "The Use of Imaginative Literature for Communication Theory Construction: Some Precautions," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 218-226.
7. See John E. O'Connor, ed., *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar, CA: Robert E. Krieger, 1990); J. E. O'Connor and M. A. Jackson, *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar Publishing Company, 1988); Peter Seixas, "Confronting the Moral Frames of Popular Film: Young People Respond to Historical Revisionism," *American Journal of Education* 102, no. 3 (1994): 261-285.
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11. Tony Brown, "Using Film in Teaching and Learning about Changing Societies," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 30, no. 2 (2011): 233-247.
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16. Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Robert Brent Toplin, "In Defense of the Filmmakers," in *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film*, ed. R. Francaviglia and J. Rodnitzky (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 113-135.
17. Toplin, "In Defense of the Filmmakers," 126-127.
18. Russell, "Teaching Social Studies with Film," 159.
19. Ibid.
20. Robert A. Rosenstone, "Inventing Historical Truth on the Silver Screen," *Cineaste* 29, no. 2 (2004): 33.
21. Russell, "Teaching Social Studies with Film."
22. Ibid., 160.
23. Russell, "Teaching Social Studies with Film."
24. Ibid.
25. Scott A. Metzger, "Maximizing the Educational Power of History Movies in the Classroom," *Social Studies* 101, no. 3 (2010): 127-136.
26. Ibid., 132.
27. Karl A. Matz and Lori L. Pingatore, "Reel to Real: Teaching the Twentieth Century with Classic Hollywood Films," *Social Education* 69, no. 4 (2005): 189.
28. Metzger, 129.
29. Alan S. Marcus, Scott Alan Metzger, Richard J. Paxton, and Jeremy D. Stoddard, *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 18.
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31. William V. Costanzo, *Great Films and How to Teach Them* (New York: National Council of Teachers of English, 2004); Marcus, Metzger, Paxton, and Stoddard.