

paved with indifference.

By pathologizing Nazi crimes, we spare ourselves the distasteful thought that, were it not for the avid participation of people very much like ourselves, the whole enterprise would have foundered early on. By isolating it as an event that occurred seemingly in a different galaxy, by considering the camps as some kind of inverted Disneyland, we set up a barrier between the evil of yesteryear and that still present among us.

In Jerusalem they have a saying: "There's no business like Shoah business." This suggests that we must constantly second-guess ourselves lest the Holocaust become fashionable, lest it be turned into kitsch. In shifting to present-day Jerusalem at the end of his film and showing us the real "Schindler Jews," Steven Spielberg has done us a service by pointedly reminding us that there *is* a difference between art and real life. Will such reminders, though, be sufficient? In seeing *Schindler's List* are we moved by the cinematography, by the actors, by its epic visual qualities? Or is it for the actual victims of the Holocaust that we shed our tears?

What precisely does *Schindler's List* help us to remember? Will it simply be recalled as an Academy Award-winning motion picture and as one of the 10 top-grossing films of 1994? Now that Hollywood has paid homage to the greatest crime of the modern era, can it return in good conscience to its normal "blockbuster" mode?

These are more than idle questions. Ours is an era that has a special difficulty in distinguishing appearances from reality. Our comprehension of the past is less and less shaped by the complexities of the written word and the intimacy of human dialogue. Increasingly, our understanding of history is transmitted via the fleeting imagery of mass media. Whether we like it or not, these media have become primary vehicles of socialization. They dictate the way we see the world.

None of these remarks are meant as a specific criticism of *Schindler's List*. They pertain more to the informational structure of late capitalist society, which applies to the production and reception of virtually all films. More specifically, they imply that we can't allow such media to educate us; and that, at best, films such as *Schindler's List* can only be part of a more general process of individual and collective coming to terms with the past.

A key historical irony here is that the Third Reich was one of the most aesthetically self-conscious regimes the world has known. It is common knowledge that Hitler himself was a failed artist. An inveterate admirer of Wagner, he at some level envisioned the Third Reich as a gigantic Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a "total work of art." From *Triumph of the Will* to *Jud Suss* to the weekly newsreel footage, regime operatives knew well how to bend cinematic art to their purposes. Goebbels' entire ministry of propaganda would be inconceivable apart from its expert demagogic employment of mass media such as radio and film.

In fact, as the war ground to its conclusion in 1945, Goebbels, in order to boost sagging morale, made the fol-

lowing telltale appeal couched in revealing, cinematic terms: "Gentlemen, in a hundred years still another color film will portray the terrible days we are undergoing now. Do you want to play a role in that film which will let you live again in a hundred years? Every one of you has to choose the person he wishes to be in a hundred years. I can assure you that it will be a tremendous film, exciting and beautiful, and worth holding steady for."

Let us make sure that we in no way become the heirs to this prototypical Nazi confusion between art and life, an ever-present temptation in our society. ◀

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Schindler's choice

By H.R. Shapiro

S*chindler's List* is now bringing awareness of the Holocaust to millions of Americans. But is it really a film about the meaning of that horror or simply a story within it, one that obscures as much as it reveals?

Steven Spielberg, hopefully unawares, has made a film that does not tell the story of the vast majority of Jews, but only of a small elite who were part of the Nazi apparatus. Spielberg's Jews are an important and integral arm of the Holocaust. They represent the *Judenrate*, or the Nazi-formed Jewish Councils.

The Nazis formed the *Judenrate* to implement Nazi policy in the Jewish community and, more importantly, to divide and conquer the Jews and to crush any resistance to the Nazis. The Jews who worked with Schindler were all leaders of the *Judenrate*.

Schindler may well have been a "righteous person," as were numerous other Germans, and he did save some 1,000 Jews from the Plaszow-Cracow camp. But Schindler was a figure within the Nazi apparatus and a part of the actual Jewish Holocaust.

Hannah Arendt, in her great study of the Jewish Holocaust, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, informs us: "Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between 4 and 6.5 million people."

The *Judenrate* were simulated state governments. Each had its own instruments of terror, the *Ornungsdienst* and *Zivilabteilung* (Nazi-Jewish and Secret Police), ministries of housing, food and welfare, etc., as well as the power to tax their communities and provide slave labor, at no charge, to the Nazi war machine. These Nazi-Jewish councils divided

privileged Jews from non-privileged. This policy was accepted by the Jewish elite in Germany and was extended after September 1939 to Poland and other occupied areas, so that even before the June 1941 Nazi attack on the USSR, Eastern Europe's Jews were atomized and isolated.

The function of the *Judenrate* was to contain and register all Jews in the old and newly formed ghettos. The obvious objective was to save the "better Jews" (themselves, to begin with) by selecting others among their own people to be sent to their deaths. "To a Jew, this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story," Arendt concluded.

Isaiah Trunk, in *Judenrat*, writes that "for ghetto inmates the Jewish Councils were the visible organs of oppression. ... Small wonder that all the pent-up hatred for the relatively remote Nazi enemy was aimed at the one visible adversary, the hated Councils."

News of the genocide of the summer of 1941 reached Warsaw almost overnight, and the great majority of Jews by the end of that year. The *Judenrate*, however, through secrecy and lies, convinced the Jewish masses that reports of horrors to the east were only rumors, and that Jews were merely being "resettled." With potential opposition thus neutralized, the Nazis were able to deport and exterminate most of the Warsaw Jews. By contrast, those who had some connection to the *Judenrate* and their associates, especially the privileged and the wealthy, survived the war.

The *Judenrate* leaders, writes historian L. Yahil, "perceived Jewish resistance as a threat to the existence of the ghetto or as a personal threat." Thus the Jewish communities at large lost the organizational means and spirit to defend themselves. This is what enabled the Nazis to blindside and murder most of the Jews in eastern Poland, the Baltic states and in the occupied USSR. M. Tenenbaum-Tamaroff, a young resistance leader who participated in revolts in Warsaw and other cities to the north, led a 1943 revolt in Bialystock to free the Jews who were on their way to the trains. The young Jews who were trying to effect the escape of the people of the city were thwarted by the *Judenrate* and lost their lives in battle with the Nazis.

"In Germany today," wrote Arendt in 1963, "[the] notion of 'prominent' Jews has not yet been forgotten. While the veterans and other privileged Jewish groups are no longer mentioned, the fate of 'famous' Jews is still deplored at the expense of all others. There are more than a few people, especially among the cultural elite, who still publicly regret the fact that Germany sent Einstein packing, without realizing it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius."

Schindler's importance in history, ironically, is that his

good works demonstrate the utter Nazification of the *Judenrate*. From Thomas Keneally's novel *Schindler's List*, as well as from Malvina Grad's autobiography, *The Krakow Ghetto and the Plaszow Camp Remembered*, one learns that virtually every principal character in the book and the film was a member of or associated with the Cracow *Judenrat*, or with the Nazis per se.

None of this is clear in the film. Schindler, no doubt for mere convenience, joined the Nazi Party in 1938 and became an agent of the *Abwehr* (counterintelligence service) in Cracow before the war in 1939. He returned to Cracow



after Germany had invaded Poland, still an *Abwehr* agent, to dodge the draft and to make his fortune with Jewish slave-labor.

One of Schindler's contacts, Dr. R. Kastner, in Hungary (a member of the *Judenrat* in Pest, and an agent of the Jewish Agency in Palestine) also saved some Jews—saved exactly 1,684, including his relatives and friends, according to Arendt. Kastner's privileged Jews survived through deals with Eichmann and the Zionist Jewish Agency, while almost 500,000 unsuspecting Jews in Hungary were exterminated.

Kastner was later tried in Israel for selecting who should and who should not survive. Zionist courts, of course, whitewashed Kastner—that is, the *Judenrate*—but, according to an Israeli army officer, Israeli agents assassinated him, no doubt to remove him from history.

Schindler's List is a film in which Schindler is portrayed as larger than life, while the Jewish people are rendered invisible. Why does Spielberg celebrate Schindler, a CEO not unlike Herman Wouk's Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny*? Spielberg may really believe that it is not the good man who will save the world but the good CEO (the good despot), in Hollywood or elsewhere, who, although he holds the people in slavery, does so for their salvation. ◀

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Making a school's choices

By Barbara Miner

Parent Denise Ferguson remembers the day in the spring of 1990 when the Local School Council (LSC) at Hefferan Elementary School met with the principal to talk about the next year's budget. The LSC was only a few months old, part of a citywide reform effort that set up councils—made up largely of parents and given powers such as the authority to hire and fire principals—in each school.

The parents, unused to having real decision-making power, initially deferred to the principal. But that was to change. According to Ferguson, the principal suggested that discretionary school monies be used to hire a full-time truant officer and a half-time choir director to teach gospel music. "And this," she adds, "was in a school that had great attendance rates, yet had maps from 1945 that still had Rhodesia, and had only four operating computers"—and where "our kids don't need to learn gospel music [because] they get that on weekends."

Parents were upset at the principal's suggestions and let him know it. The council polled the teachers and then decided to spend the money in other ways—hiring a new teacher for

a computer lab, and purchasing new books and maps. They also made another crucial decision: to hire a new principal who would take charge at the end of the school year.

Parents having the power to make such decisions may seem a dream to many of those who have struggled to get administrators to listen to their advice—let alone take it seriously. But such parental power is becoming the norm in Chicago.

While some school reforms focus on changes in curriculum or teacher training, the Chicago effort targets what is generally called "governance"—that is, who makes the decisions in schools. The reforms, considered the most ambitious of any major urban school district in the country, were mandated by state law in 1988 and were the result of widespread, long-term community organizing to improve Chicago's public schools. One major goal was to cut the powers of the central office, which in Chicago had earned national notoriety for its entrenched bureaucratic practices, and to turn over as much decision-making as possible to the local schools.

The heart of the Chicago reform is the establishment of elected LSCs in each of the city's almost 600 schools.

Each council has six parents, two community representatives, two teachers, the principal and, in the high schools, a student. The parents and community representatives on the board are elected by parents and community residents. The student and teacher representatives are appointed by the Board of Education following advisory elections by their peers at each school.

The verdict is still out on whether this ambitious reform effort will accomplish its ultimate goal: improving the educational performance of the approximately 440,000 students in the city's public schools, roughly 90 percent of whom are non-white. Yet no one denies the importance of the reform or its uniqueness. Not only do the councils have the authority to hire or fire principals, but they also approve the school's budget and school-improvement plan that outlines changes in curriculum and teaching practices.

Perhaps the best way to begin to understand the many complexities and contradictions involved in the Chicago reform process is to look at how the reform has affected one school where the council appears to have worked particularly well, and to examine how some of the parents there view the reform. Hefferan, a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade elementary school, is located on the city's West Side in a neighborhood whose appearance reflects the stereotype of a troubled inner city. Boarded-up buildings are common; trash and broken bottles litter the streets.

Hefferan Principal Patricia Harvey doesn't allow outdoor recess because she cannot guarantee the children's safety, given the number of drug dealers and alcoholics who hang out near the school. All but one of Hefferan's 676 students are African-American, and 90 percent of the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price federal lunch program.

In the spring of 1990, in one of its