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OUR ENEMIES

Now look here, Fräulein, it isn't very pleasant to have to beat a pretty girl like yourself, but I have a duty to perform.

—Gestapo colonel Heller (Martin Kosleck)
in *Underground*

Well, I don't hate Japs—yet. It's a funny thing. I don't *like* 'em, but I don't *hate* 'em.

—Lt. Bob Gray (Robert Mitchum) in
Thirty Seconds over Tokyo

POPULAR MEDIA HAVE ALWAYS BEEN an important cultural vehicle for transmitting ideas to people about who they are and, just as important, who they aren't. As Edward Said and others have shown, a society's sense of national identity is based to a great extent on the way it contrasts itself to other societies that are different, foreign, strange, and often threatening—in short, its enemies. Hollywood films, because they were seen by huge numbers of people over the whole country, were the most efficient and powerful means of communicating ideas about American national identity and America's enemies in the 1940s. We discuss how Hollywood films promoted certain ideas about Americans' identities in chapter 6. Here we explore how Hollywood films made just before and after Pearl Harbor constructed the Germans, Italians, and Japanese as enemies. We've already touched on (see chapters 1 and 2) some of the ways Hollywood films prepared Americans to think about the Germans and the Japanese.

We now examine more specifically the narrative and cinematic techniques films used to construct ways to know our enemies.

One frequently heard truism is that Hollywood films crudely and obviously present the enemy as Other to the point of denying their humanity. The late newspaper columnist Mike Royko expressed this view in an interview with Studs Terkel: "And all those movies. I took a vacation in Florida recently and every time I looked up at a palm tree, I expected a Jap sniper up there. In these movies, every tree had a little Nip sittin' up there. . . . Our guys were the good guys and the other side was evil. That was years before anybody made a movie in which they showed any compassion, any understanding at all for the others—that they were human beings."¹ A variation of this truism is that only late in the war do films start making a distinction between Nazis and "good" Germans. Like most truisms, however, these are only partly true. Certainly, the great majority of films dealing with the war in the Pacific construct the Japanese as Other, though more complex presentations of Japanese characters occasionally crop up. But we found that throughout the war, distinctions were made about different kinds of Germans. And the Italians were never presented as a threatening enemy at all. In short, the movies' construction of the enemy was more complex—and more interesting—than today's viewers assume. Employing already familiar movie conventions, the films succeeded in defining our enemies in such a way that Americans could understand why they must be fought and defeated; yet at the same time, to varying degrees, Hollywood films made connections between Americans and their enemies, both to heighten the contrast with the enemy and to prepare for rebuilding relationships after the war.

We saw in chapter 1 that in the prewar films *Foreign Correspondent* and *Man Hunt*, many of the Germans (though they weren't specified as Germans in the former) were presented as stock spy or gangster movie figures: thuggish, inarticulate, threatening, mindlessly obeying orders. Audiences knew that they were evil simply from the way they were costumed, lit, and photographed; viewers recognized the type and so knew how they were supposed to respond. The first thing to note, then, about the presentation of the German enemy during World War II is that filmmakers already had an arsenal of German types that they had been using at least since World War I and that were available for updating for this new war. We argued in chapter 1 that World War I films made in 1940 and 1941 displaced the contemporary war in Europe onto the earlier war, but something of a reverse process was happening as well: films about the

contemporary war employed character types perfected in films about the previous war. Think, for example, of Baron von Kranz, played by Lucien Prival, in *Hell's Angels* (1930): he is a Prussian aristocrat, formal, stiff, humorless—except when faced with the opportunity for cruelty—and a natural and enthusiastic fighter. Think, too, of Captain von Rauffenstein, played by Erich von Stroheim in *Grand Illusion* (1937; U.S. release 1938): also aristocratic, stiff, and formal, but cultured and intellectual as well—qualities that, regretfully, he must repress so that he can do his duty. That each of these character types was easily transferred to the Nazis can be seen by the number of times these two actors played such roles in World War II films—Prival in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *Beasts of Berlin* (1939), *The Mortal Storm* (1940), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Submarine Base* (1943), and *Assignment in Brittany* (1943), and von Stroheim in *So Ends Our Night* (1941), *The North Star* (1943), and *Five Graves to Cairo* (as General Rommel, 1943). Further, the Prival-type character can be seen in the many evil Nazis played by Martin Kosleck and other actors in scores of films; the von Stroheim type can be seen in intellectual Nazis played by Conrad Veidt, Otto Preminger, George Sanders, Laird Cregar, Sydney Greenstreet, and others. The Hollywood presentation of the Nazis thus began with depictions of Germans that were already familiar to audiences and operated within accepted stereotypes.

This adoption of available German types was combined with techniques that contrasted the Germans to the Allies. In the introduction we saw how Winston Churchill persuasively conjured up the binary oppositions between the British and the Germans in order to define the Germans and the war for his listeners, and we saw the way Frank Capra adapted those binary oppositions in his *Why We Fight* series. Other films participated in the same rhetoric—associating culturally preferred qualities with the Allies and culturally abrogated qualities with the Germans—to make their case about the Germans as enemy.

A good example from early in the war is MGM's *Mrs. Miniver*, directed by William Wyler and released on May 13, 1942. In a key scene Mrs. Miniver (Greer Garson) discovers a wounded German pilot (Helmut Dantine) whose plane was shot down during a recent bombardment of London and environs. The only German character to appear in the film, he becomes the personification of all the otherwise anonymous destruction that Germany is inflicting on England. His sudden, startling appearance in the Minivers' well-kept garden and ordered suburban home is representative of the larger threat of a German invasion. Just before Mrs.

Miniver discovers the pilot in her garden, she has been chatting with Mr. Ballard (Henry Travers), out early to fish. He quotes from the Bible and tells Mrs. Miniver that the community's annual flower show, held at the local aristocratic manor, will go on despite the war. This dialogue telegraphs to us the qualities the film wants to associate with the British: Christianity, tradition, civilization, culture. The German, in contrast, is associated with the opposite qualities. Whereas the fleeing Mrs. Miniver keeps to her garden path, he smashes through bushes and plants to catch her. He speaks broken English in a guttural accent. While eating he spills milk down his uniform and shoves meat and bread into his mouth. Whereas Mrs. Miniver tries to show compassion and can't even bring herself to hold a pistol on him, he returns hate and threatened violence. He boasts, "Rotterdam we destroy in two hours," and to Mrs. Miniver's protest that 30,000 innocent people, including women and children, were killed, he rejoins, "Not innocent. They were against us." Contrasted to Mrs. Miniver and the British in general, he is barbaric, destructive, barely human; he



Mrs. Miniver: Mrs. Miniver (Greer Garson) gets the better of a downed German pilot (Helmut Dantine).

shows no respect for compassion, culture, or the rules of war. Most frighteningly, he is presented as the typical German. He tells Mrs. Miniver, "I am finish. But others come. Like me. Thousands. Many thousands."

The opposition here is created via a contrast between an upstanding Englishwoman and a supposedly typical German. Films depicting life in Nazi Germany create their arguments for the Germans as enemy through a more complex series of oppositions. These oppositions—in such films as *The Hitler Gang*, *The Man I Married*, *The Mortal Storm*, *Underground*, *So Ends Our Night*, *Hitler's Children*, *The Seventh Cross*, and *None Shall Escape*—work in different ways, but they share the technique of using conflicts within German society or between Germans and other nationalities as a means of defining Nazis as enemy, frequently finding ways to introduce an explicit or implicit American point of view with which the audience can identify. The result is a fairly consistent picture of the Germans as enemies, but with a suggestion that the evil in Germany flows from the top down, corrupting those who, in different circumstances, would be fine people and creating enclaves of resistance inhabited by the "good" Germans, who are like us.

The evil at the top of the hierarchy of German society is most concisely articulated in *The Hitler Gang*, a weird pseudodocumentary released by Paramount on May 7, 1944. The screenplay sought to present Hitler's rise to power, and the film's preface promises authenticity, "insofar as decency will permit." But more effective in creating the aura of reality is the strategy (as in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*) of postponing the credits until the end: at the beginning we get only the title; no actors, writers, director, or producers are mentioned. As the title suggests, the film doesn't invest all the evil of Nazism in Hitler (Bobby Watson). The men around him—Goebbels (Martin Kosleck), Himmler (Luis Van Rooten), and Göring (Alexander Pope)—contribute to the film's construction of Nazism. The Nazi leaders are presented as unstable and perverse: a doctor finds Corp. Adolf Hitler insane at the end of World War I; the film implies a homoerotic relationship between Hitler and Rudolf Hess (Victor Varconi) and, more overtly, an incestuous relationship between Hitler and his niece Geli (Poldy Dur); Göring is a morphine addict. The Nazi leadership is egotistical and temperamental: Hitler must be coddled like an opera star; at the least resistance he pouts and says he can't go on. The Nazi leadership is untrustworthy and hypocritical: until he has power, Hitler toadies to the powerful, telling them whatever they want to hear; his henchmen delight in betraying others and even plot against one another and Hitler. The Nazi



The Hitler Gang: Adolf Hitler (Bobby Watson), Rudolf Hess (Victor Varconi), Heinrich Himmler (Luis Van Rooten), Joseph Goebbels (Martin Kosleck), and Hermann Göring (Alexander Pope) consider how best to conquer the world.

leadership is cowardly: they are always the first to flee fights and are experts at getting others to fight their battles for them. The Nazi leadership's only ideology is power for power's sake: they have no commitment to any issue or idea beyond its use in gaining power.

In one scene, set in 1920, the German Workers Party, precursor to the Nazi Party, looks for a scapegoat to energize its platform, illustrating many of these ideas. After several suggestions for attackable minorities are made and rejected, Himmler modestly proposes the Jews. Hitler is inspired and launches into an oration:

HITLER: The Jews are the cause of all our troubles. The Jews started the war! The Jews were the cause of our defeat!

STRASSER (Fritz Kortner): Let us at least be logical. They cannot be responsible for both the war and the peace.

HITLER: I cannot work under these conditions. I cannot work with

people who don't believe in me. I resign. I resign! . . . I have nothing to do with logic. Logic is the business of little minds, the so-called intellectuals who sit and talk and do nothing. I want action. I accept anything that leads to action.

STRASSER: I want action as much as you do, but let us pick on something that's nearer to the truth.

ROSENBERG (Tonio Selwart): The truth? What is the truth? It's something you've heard so often that you accept it as the truth.

HITLER: Then I shall *make* it the truth! And I shall repeat it again and again, in different ways, but the meaning will always be the same! The Jew is responsible for all our trouble. The Jew is responsible for all our trouble!

Here we see Hitler as madman and as prima donna. We also see the cynicism and hypocrisy of the party's realpolitik and the ruthlessness that permits any act if it will obtain power. These qualities in one way or another are found in most depictions of Nazi leadership—at any level of the hierarchy—in Hollywood films. Conrad Veidt's Major Strasser in *Casablanca*, Erich von Stroheim's Dr. Von Harden in *The North Star*, Laird Cregar's Herr Funk in *Joan of Paris* (1942), Otto Preminger's Major Diessen in *The Pied Piper* (1942), and Sydney Greenstreet's Colonel Robinson in *Background to Danger* (1943)—along with the various Nazi characters in the films discussed later—are ready examples of characters on the lower end of the party and military hierarchy who act in much the same manner as the leaders at the top.

The Man I Married, a Twentieth Century-Fox second feature released on July 16, 1940, shows the corrupt power at the top of the Nazi hierarchy trickling down through the entire German society. As American journalist Delane (Lloyd Nolan) says of average Germans' willing participation in Nazism, "They catch it from Schickie," his pet name for Hitler. Only a few Germans recognize the evil of his power, and they are overwhelmed by it. The film sets up an opposition between Germany under national socialism and a young American woman visitor who gets an education she didn't expect. Carol (Joan Bennett), a single mother and writer for a glossy magazine, meets a charming German immigrant, Eric Hoffman (Francis Lederer), in New York and marries him in July 1938. For their honeymoon, they travel to Germany so that Carol can meet Eric's father and Eric can tie up some unfinished business before he moves permanently to the United States. Carol, like the naïfs in *Foreign Correspondent* and *Man Hunt*, is largely

unaware of what's going on in Germany and dismisses much of what she reads as journalistic sensationalism. As she becomes increasingly concerned about what she sees happening in Germany—the military buildup, the persecution of the Czechs, the restriction of individual liberties—Eric becomes swept up in Nazism to the point that he no longer wishes to return to New York. He plans to divorce Carol and send her back to the States but keep her son Ricky (Johnny Russell) to raise as a German. Carol manages to get Ricky safely back to New York with the help of Delane and Eric's father (Otto Kruger), who threatens to reveal to the authorities that Eric's mother was a Jew.

Carol enters Germany with an open mind, willing to be fair and to discount what she perceives as propaganda, but her education about Nazism is marked by several instances in which she and her German hosts respond differently to the same event. Upon arriving at the train station in Berlin, Johnny imitates his hero, the Lone Ranger, and yahoos while shooting his cap pistol. While Carol is charmed by his innocence, the German civilians cower and take cover, and the soldiers point their rifles, ready to fire. At a military parade the German spectators enthuse over the Wehrmacht paratroopers, but Carol remarks that it “looks like something you see at the circus.” Carol's joke about Hitler—she calls him Schickie, which she picked up from Delane—shocks Eric and later serves as grounds for divorce. Conversely, when Delane and Carol see Gestapo officers forcing Czechs to clean garbage off the street, Carol is horrified, while the German passersby laugh. These incidents are summed up by Delane when he says, “We can still laugh at ourselves. These poor boys over here lost their sense of humor, if they ever had any. And any nation that doesn't know how to laugh is dangerous.” The issue of humor here marks the difference between the American point of view and the German: the two societies are operating from completely different assumptions—about right and wrong, about how nationality is defined, about how patriotism is enacted, about how power is employed. For Carol, the absurdity that leads to laughter turns into an absurdity that causes terror as she realizes that hardly anyone in Germany recognizes what she sees to be absurd.

Mrs. Miniver presents a fairly straightforward enemy, one who embodies everything we fear and nothing we respect; *The Hitler Gang* presents a more layered picture of the enemy, but an enemy that is nevertheless despicable; *The Man I Married* presents German society as a through-the-looking-glass world where American values have been lost. More often, however, films focusing on Germany show a conflicted society in which

many enthusiastically throw themselves into the workings of national socialism; others go along reluctantly, through weakness, fear, or ignorance; and still others resist. These films construct an idea of the enemy, but they also define the enemy more sharply, demonstrate the enemy's use of power, and make connections between those who would oppose the Nazis and the American viewing audience.

One of the best prewar film critiques of Nazi Germany uses oppositions within German society to help define America's distinctiveness from its potential enemy. *The Mortal Storm*, the screen adaptation of Phyllis Bottome's novel, was released on June 11, 1940. Opening on January 30, 1933, the day Hitler was named chancellor, the film tells the story of how ascendant Nazism affects the family of a Jewish chemistry professor and their small Bavarian town. The always cautious MGM began the film with a voice-over suggesting that the film was promoting peace, not intervention, but reviews at the time argued that its anti-Nazi themes had been made outdated by real-world events. Howard Barnes in the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "There have been a dozen plays, in my recollection, which pointed out the terror that swept Germany when Hitler was appointed Chancellor. None of them was very convincing for the simple reason that they presupposed that there was a strong liberal sentiment in Germany which opposed the Third Reich. At this late date, this thesis may be pleasant to contemplate, but it certainly doesn't stand up factually or dramatically."²

This approach to the film—seeing it as a story about the defeat of German liberalism by Nazism—seems to miss the point. The film can more profitably be seen as defining Germany under Hitler by contrasting the Nazis with liberal German characters who are, in effect, stand-ins for Americans. This contrast is established very early in the film as Professor Roth (Frank Morgan) is surprised on his birthday—January 30, 1933—by a celebratory gathering of family, colleagues, and students in his chemistry classroom. Presentations are made by two students: Fritz Marberg (Robert Young) and Martin Breitner (James Stewart). Fritz walks, stands, and bows stiffly; his speech is clipped and his presentation formal. In contrast, Martin seems as American as, well, Jimmy Stewart; he shuffles, he fidgets, he searches his pockets for notes he can't find, he stutters, he speaks in a nasally twang, and after being introduced in Latin as "candidatus medicinae vetrinariae," he explains, "in plain language, horse doctor."³ Before any ideological conflicts have been introduced, the film, through casting and direction, has made a distinction between "German" characters and "American"

characters. Indeed, though not as blatantly as in Stewart's case, the other actors playing German characters with whom we are meant to sympathize—Morgan as Professor Roth, Margaret Sullavan as his daughter Freya, Irene Rich as his wife—speak in their normal American voices, making no attempt to suggest a foreign accent.

The ideological differences are introduced that evening at the professor's birthday party. The small gathering—the family plus Fritz and Martin—is interrupted by the radio announcement of Hitler's being named chancellor. At this point the warmth and unity that had characterized the film break down as Fritz and the professor's two stepsons, Otto von Rohn (Robert Stack) and Erich von Rohn (William T. Orr), are revealed to be Nazi Party members. They immediately begin spouting a doctrine of totalitarianism, intolerance, and submission to the state. To a demurring Martin, Fritz says, "Now, there'll be one party and only one." Otto adds, "A man's got to take a stand. If he's not for us, he's against us, and against Germany." Freya objects, "You're getting very intolerant, all of you," to which Otto responds, "We *should* be intolerant! Of anyone who opposes the will of our leader." Soon after, Fritz, Otto, and Erich are called to a party meeting; the local leader also wants Martin to attend, but Martin says, "Tell him peasants have no politics. They keep cows." Fritz answers, "If they want to keep their cows, they'd better have the *right* politics." When Professor Roth laughingly laments that Hitler has broken up the birthday party, his youngest son, Rudi (Gene Reynolds), explains what he's learned in school: "You oughtn't to mind. . . . The individual must be sacrificed to the welfare of the state."

Martin and Professor Roth try to oppose Fritz, Otto, and Erich's party philosophy with a position of pluralism. When Fritz contemptuously accuses Martin of being a pacifist, he responds with a line that will recur as a credo of liberalism throughout the film: "I think peace is better than war. A man's right to think as he believes is as good for him as food and drink." The professor tries to patch up the vehement argument that follows by urging everyone to put Martin's philosophy into practice: "Can't we discuss these matters without quarreling? After all, every hen thinks she's laid the best egg. May we not believe as we choose and allow others to do the same?" Later, after Nazism has transformed the small university town, the family is again disrupted as Otto and Erich choose to leave their home because of Freya's continued friendship with Martin. Professor Roth tries to reason with them: "You ask me to force your sister to give up a life-long friend, a young man we've always liked and respected. No, I couldn't do

that. You and your brother have chosen your way, and we've respected your decision. We're entitled to the same tolerance." Needless to say, the brothers are not persuaded.

This intolerance for a diversity of opinion is connected to a closed-mindedness toward any idea that diverges from Nazi dogma. Professor Roth becomes the subject of a student boycott because he refuses to say in his chemistry class that Aryan and non-Aryan blood are different. Although he is in favor of pluralism when it comes to ideology, in science there is only truth and falsehood. Shortly afterward, he looks out his classroom window and sees the university's students burning books because they assert facts that Hitler refuses to recognize. The professor is eventually arrested and sent to a concentration camp because of his refusal to recant his work. He tells his wife, after she has managed a single visit, not to have false hope for his future: "You see, even if they let me out, I should still fight for scientific truth." As it turns out, he's correct: the family soon receives notice of his death.

These disruptions of family and personal relationships—beginning with the interruption of the professor's birthday party and continuing with the off-screen guard who continually interrupts the final conversation between the professor and his wife—reach their thematic climax when Fritz is ordered to lead a patrol to capture Freya and Martin before they can escape into Switzerland. He asks to be relieved of this duty, saying to the local party leader (Rudolph Anders), "I once looked upon these two people as my closest friends. . . . I realize that this duty must be carried out, but I beg of you to understand a human weakness." The leader responds, "You have sworn allegiance to the Third Reich. In the service of your country, there are no human relationships." The extent of Fritz's transformation is underscored here by the lighting, which creates a shadow under his nose reminiscent of Hitler's mustache.

Connected to the Nazi state's intolerance and the continual disruption of human relationships is the distrust of individuality. When a local Nazi commander (Dan Dailey) enters a pub, all the patrons are expected to stand and sing Nazi anthems. The camera lingers over the conformity of the scene, the pub patrons all standing in precise rows, their arms held forward in a salute at precisely the same angle. When a middle-aged teacher (Thomas Ross) tries to eat his dinner without standing and without drawing attention to himself, he is singled out for abuse. He defends himself by saying, "Surely, a man is free to sing or not as he pleases." The Nazis, of course, refuse to respect his individualism. Throughout the film the Nazi

characters repeatedly justify their actions by saying, "I have no choice." This is contrasted to the idea of the independent individual, marked by the refrain we hear from Martin and his mother (Maria Ouspenskaya): "I can take care of myself."

In the climactic scene, in which Martin and Freya dash to the Swiss border as Fritz's patrol pursues and finally shoots Freya dead, the film suggests that Hitler and Nazism have transformed Germany into a sort of hell. Martin and Freya's flight suggests Orpheus's attempt to bring Eurydice out of the underworld. Martin even says at one point as they struggle up a mountain, "Every time I look back, you seem to be smaller." The final lesson seems to be that any country that embraces totalitarianism, intolerance of dissenting opinions, loss of individuality, and the demeaning of human relationships is indeed hell.

Another element of Nazism, the desire for national purity, is critiqued in a film released about six months after *The Mortal Storm*. *So Ends Our Night* also uses clearly defined oppositions to make its points. Adapted from the Erich Maria Remarque novel *Flotsam*, *So Ends Our Night* was released by United Artists on January 27, 1941. Set between 1937 and 1939, the film tells the story of several refugees, people without a nation or a home because they have been evicted from Nazi Germany owing to their non-Aryan background. These refugees are essentially nonpeople because they have no passports to give them identities or to allow them to reside anywhere legally. This point is made early in the film by Brenner (Erich von Stroheim), a Gestapo agent, as he tries to persuade Josef Steiner (Fredric March) to betray his friends in the German underground in exchange for a passport: "Just compare our situations. Yours is hopeless. You're a man without a country or a legal right to live, a living ghost. My situation on the other hand is a secure and comfortable one. And all that stands between us is this [the passport]." The Orwellian absurdity of this thinking is remarked by Ludwig Kern (Glenn Ford), whose expulsion from France is halted when he receives official papers allowing him to stay. He says to an uncomprehending border guard, "Through this piece of paper, I've become a respectable person, a free man who can do what he likes, haven't I? . . . Don't you find that strange? . . . Well, yesterday I was the same man I am today, and yesterday everything was prohibited, illegal." The guard replies, "I find it quite in order. You have the right to live—in writing, stamped and signed."

The absurdity of this opposition—between those with and without passports—is used to critique the bureaucratic notion of nation, identity,

and home that supports the Nazi effort to create a pure, exclusionary nation and, incidentally, to critique those nations that refuse to help the refugees created by Nazism. The film also sets up an opposition between this bureaucratic notion and an informal, ad hoc idea. As refugees Steiner and Kern slog from country to country—Austria, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, France—they encounter the same people over and over again until something of a family is formed—a family that helps to replace the lost nation and provide a stable identity. One man (Leonid Kinskey), for example, is known by his fondness for roast chicken, another (Alexander Granach) by his appetite for eggs. This nonbureaucratic idea of nation is made most clear at the end of the film, when Kern and his lover, Ruth Holland (Margaret Sullavan), speculate on where they might live. Kern says, “The first thing we’ll do, we’ll get married. Understand? Married. We may not have a home anywhere for a while, but we’ll be together.” Ruth responds, “That’s home, darling.” As in *The Mortal Storm*, a home based on personal relationships is preferred to one defined by a totalitarian state.

Another prewar film, *Underground*, uses conflicts within Germany to create oppositions by which the Nazis can be understood. A June 18, 1941, Warner Bros. release, *Underground* tells the story of two German brothers; one is a soldier, just returned to Berlin after losing his arm at the front, and the other is a leader of the underground resistance, broadcasting anti-Nazi messages over an illegal radio. Early in the film, the latter brother, Eric Franken (Philip Dorn), makes a broadcast that sets up the film’s defining oppositions. He tells his listeners, “Tonight we come to you again in spite of the Gestapo with the news of the real conditions inside of Germany. And we take courage in knowing that thousands of you are willing to risk your lives in order to hear the only words of truth spoken in our unhappy and desecrated country today. And yet how else can you know the truth? You are forbidden to listen to any foreign news broadcasts. You are not allowed to read any newspaper or publication except those owned by the government or censored by Dr. Goebbels himself.” He encourages wives and mothers to write to their husbands and sons at the front about the real shortages at home, defying Hitler’s orders that they lie. He wonders why Rudolf Hess defected: “He went to England because that is the only place in Europe where the Gestapo can’t stop him from talking and can’t keep him from telling the truth.” He twice reminds his listeners that Hitler has broken his promises to the country and the world. The pattern established here and then repeated throughout the film is clear: the Nazi government

is associated with lies; the underground opposition to the government is associated with the truth.

Connected to this main opposition between lies and truth is another opposition, this one between appearance and reality. As Eric argues in his broadcast, the success of the Nazi state is an illusion based on lies. The members of the underground can see through these illusions and find the truth behind them as easily as they can see through the document a torture victim is forced to sign saying that she wasn't hurt or mistreated. The Nazis, in contrast, rarely see through the illusions the underground conjures up: a tow truck hides the underground's illegal radio; the underground's meeting place is guarded by an apparently blind lookout; Gestapo colonel Heller (Martin Kosleck) never suspects that Fräulein Gessner (Mona Maris), his secretary, is a mole for the underground; Fräulein Gessner successfully spreads demoralizing rumors throughout Gestapo headquarters. These deceptions are so successful because the Nazis, living in a world based on lies, are ill equipped to negotiate the slippery differences between appearance and reality.

These themes come together in the story of Eric's brother, Kurt (Jeffrey Lynn). He plays the role of naïf (like Carol in *The Man I Married* or Johnny Jones in *Foreign Correspondent*), an innocent whom the film sets about educating. Kurt, returned from the front, takes what he sees and hears at face value. He unknowingly begins moving among the fringes of the underground when he falls in love with Sylvia Helmuth (Kaaren Verne), one of Eric's colleagues. When Sylvia is arrested, he is convinced of her innocence and concerned for her safety. He asks Eric, "They wouldn't hurt her, not a girl, would they?" Eric responds, "Why not?" Later, after he sees firsthand evidence of her involvement with the underground, instead of turning her in, he tries to rescue her, inadvertently betraying his brother instead. At the Gestapo headquarters afterward, he laments that he didn't know his brother was in the underground; Fräulein Gessner says to him, "It's just possible there are many more things you don't know, Herr Franken." She shows him his brother and father (also arrested) being tortured. His eyes at last opened, Kurt articulates his opposition to the Nazis: "I'm sick of them, their lies and their beatings." Fräulein Gessner shows him how he can put this opposition into action: "Help us. Help the underground. Help us show to the people the truth." In being initiated into the job of spreading the truth, however, Kurt is also introduced into the world of appearances: to prove his loyalty, he must let Heller and Eric believe that he knowingly turned in his own brother. He learns to appear to be a loyal

German on the surface so that he can, in reality, oppose the Nazis, taking Eric's place as the underground's broadcaster.

Unlike *The Mortal Storm*, which used its "good" Germans as stand-ins for Americans, *Underground* suggests a genuine division in German society. The Nazis are evil, but there are right-thinking, freedom-loving Germans who are doing what they can to oppose Hitler. More interesting, the film also shows us the Germans in between. There are naive patriots, like Kurt, who believe that their country is right because they haven't thought very much about it and so don't see through the lies. There are also those like the Frankens' maid, Ella (Lisa Golm), who believe the lies because they're afraid not to. Testifying against Herr Franken, she tells Kurt, "Please Herr Kurt, you don't realize what they do to you nowadays. They make you so afraid, you don't know what's right and what's wrong." The structure of lies that is the Nazi state is supported by fear: make people afraid, and they will believe whatever you tell them to.

A similar distinction between the Nazis in power and the general populace they contaminate and corrupt is made in *Hitler's Children*, a January 6, 1943, RKO release. A Romeo-and-Juliet-like love story between a young Gestapo officer, Karl Brunner (Tim Holt), and a young American girl of German extraction, Anna Muller (Bonita Granville), is at the center of the film, but more interesting is its exploration of the transmission and enforcement of Nazi ideology.

Hitler's Children focuses on the idea of reproduction in two senses. First is biological reproduction. We see women in 1938 Berlin being encouraged to have children for the welfare of the state. One woman is reassured that once she has her fifth child, the state will forgive her family's debts. At a women's labor camp, the prisoners are supposed to let themselves be impregnated by visiting young men without worrying about marriage. This is euphemistically called sharing "the experience that makes them worthy of the Führer." This service to the state is repeatedly compared to men serving in the armed forces. As one pregnant woman (Carla Boehm) explains, "I shall have a child for the state and for the Führer. Isn't that much nobler than having a child just for a home and a husband. . . . Do you know what I'm hoping? I hope I shall have much pain when my baby is born. I want to feel that I'm going through a real ordeal for our Führer." Connected to this procreative encouragement, as in *So Ends Our Night*, is a concern for national purity. We see women who are deemed unfit to reproduce being sterilized in a kind of clinical assembly line. A Gestapo officer (Otto Kruger) explains, "We are building a new Germany,

a strong Germany. There is no room for the sick and the weak and the unstable. . . . Of course, although the majority of our cases are the weak and the unstable, our doctors operate for a number of other reasons. . . . They range from eliminating hereditary color blindness to dangerous political thinking.” Once again, we see the Nazis interfering in personal human relationships.

The second sense of reproduction is ideological reproduction, the transmission of Nazi ideology to young people. The Nazi state is committed to brainwashing children in its dogma. We see this over and over: the lessons at the Horst Wessel school at the beginning of the film, the games of the Hitler Youth, the informal catechisms that party members rehearse to children on the street, the discipline of the labor camp. It’s no coincidence that the vocabulary here suggests a religion; the film presents Nazism as a secular religion, complete with rites and ceremonies (as in the carefully choreographed whipping scene) and reverent obeisance to the state.⁴ This transference of religious authority from the church to the state, according to Franz Erhart (Lloyd Corrigan), speaks to the German character: “You Americans will never understand us. Maybe it is the will to obey that is in us Germans. How easy to march in step once you have started.”

The film ends by suggesting that there are some Germans who have enough humanity and desire for freedom to resist the state’s attempts to pervert human relations and religious authority. Karl is one of them, as he uses his show trial to speak out for freedom and love. There are also some Germans who have just enough courage to overcome the state-generated fear and find small ways to express their resistance. The film’s last scene shows timid Franz Erhart disconnecting the wires of a loudspeaker blasting martial music as a voice-over tells us, “if he isn’t as much a hero as he ought to be, he isn’t as much a coward as he used to be either.” Interestingly, both Karl and Franz are inspired to take their stands through art—for Karl, the poetry of Goethe; for Franz, the music of Beethoven. Art remains a medium for the expression of what’s best and most valued in human beings, even under dictators.

This idea of the humanity at the heart of the average German is also the heavy-handed theme of MGM’s *The Seventh Cross*, released on July 24, 1944, and based on the novel by Anna Seghers. Set in 1936, the film follows George Heisler (Spencer Tracy), one of seven escapees from a concentration camp, as he tries to avoid capture and find a way out of the country. The narration by Wallau (Ray Collins), another escapee, keeps a parallel focus on Heisler’s moral journey. Wallau argues that the Nazi state

maintains its power by dehumanizing the populace. Wallau is concerned that Heisler, once a rebel, has become dehumanized through the loss of faith in other people. As he hides and eventually escapes from Germany, we see Heisler regain his faith in the inherent goodness of people. The focus here is not on the wielders of power—the camp commandant and the Gestapo officers appear infrequently. Rather, the focus is on the average German. We see several characters who, through fear or ideological commitment, refuse to help Heisler or even threaten him. But we also see a large number of people who do help him. Some who don't know him help out of charitable impulses; members of the underground help because of their dedication to the movement; friends from before his arrest help out of loyalty. By the end of the film, as he's about to leave Germany for Holland, he explains what he's learned: "I know that no matter how cruelly the world strikes at the souls of men, there is a God-given decency in them that will come out if it gets half a chance. And that's the hope for the human race." Like *Underground* and *Hitler's Children*, *The Seventh Cross* encourages viewers to see that there are different types of Germans, many of whom are good, decent people, even if their goodness and decency have been beaten down by those in power.

All these narratives about our German enemies can be seen at work in an interesting way in *None Shall Escape*. This film was released by Columbia on January 28, 1944, more than four months before D-day and more than a year before the end of the war, yet it is remarkably prescient, anticipating not only the Nuremberg trials but also the accused war criminals' line of defense. It is set in the future, after the Allies have defeated Germany, at a war crimes trial convened by the United Nations (representatives from around the world are present). The accused is Wilhelm Grimm, Reichscommissioner for western Poland (Alexander Knox). Most of the film is presented in flashbacks as witnesses give their testimony. We see Grimm as a civilian, returning to the Polish village of Litzbark after World War I to take up his post as schoolmaster. His fiancée, Marja (Marsha Hunt), postpones their wedding because she's concerned by the abuse he heaps on the Poles. Returning from a sojourn in Warsaw, she discovers that Grimm has raped one of his students, who then killed herself. There is not enough evidence to convict him, so he borrows money from the local priest and rabbi and leaves the village. Grimm's brother Karl (Erik Rolf) testifies to his return to Munich, where he joins and rises in the ranks of the Nazi Party. When Karl prepares to move his family to Vienna, Grimm has him arrested and takes his son Willie under his

care. Marja testifies to Grimm's return to Litzbark as Reichscommissioner in 1939, with a grown Willie (Richard Crane) as his aide, and to the terror he institutes.

There are many familiar elements here. As a stand-in for the Nazi Party leadership, Grimm is irrationally convinced of his superiority to everyone; he is egotistical but cowardly, as we see when he runs away or betrays someone close to him every time he faces a crisis. He is also presented as sharing the self-serving hypocrisy of the Nazi leadership: in jail for his part in the Beer Hall Putsch, he eats caviar from a silver service, and while demanding that Litzbark produce impossible quotas of food to feed the Wehrmacht, he eats gourmet meals and drinks imported coffee and brandy.

The film also makes a distinction between Nazis and other, presumably decent Germans. On the one hand, the film stresses that Grimm is typical, not an unusually cruel Nazi. At the end of her testimony, Marja says that after Grimm left Litzbark, "Those of us who felt that such cruelty, such complete lack of human decency, was peculiar to him alone learned otherwise in the years that followed. Those who came after him may have varied their forms of torture and brutality, but they were the same. They were all Wilhelm Grimms. They were Nazis." On the other hand, we see that not all Germans are Nazis. Karl stands up as a decent man appalled by what he sees happening to his country. And, as in *Hitler's Children*, Willie learns to see beyond the Nazi ideology and find his own humanity through his love for a young woman, Janina (Dorothy Morris), Marja's daughter. When Janina dies, shot by another officer presumably while resisting being raped, Willie rejects Nazism and finally acknowledges the disruption of his family that Grimm has engineered. Following the procession carrying Janina's body into the church, he tells his uncle, "I want to pray. I want to pray to my father to ask him to forgive me. I want to let him know that now I understand what he did. I want to be forgiven for having deserted him and my mother. For having been a traitor." Grimm then completes the destruction of the family by shooting and killing his nephew.

More graphically than in *So Ends Our Night*, the film shows the Nazis' process of creating Others, enemies who threaten the purity of the German nation. Grimm has no respect for the Poles while he's a teacher in Litzbark. After the German invasion, they are objects to be used in the service of the German army. Men aged sixteen to sixty are sent to labor camps. Young women, including Janina, are rounded up and imprisoned in a brothel, euphemistically called the Officers' Club. One officer (Kurt

Kreuger) sums up this process of objectification: "These aren't people, they're dogs. But good dogs. You can train them." More surprising, considering the film's release date, is the presentation of the persecution of Litzbark's Jews. The synagogue is emptied of its contents, which are burned, and it is turned into a stable. The rabbi and other Jews are shown wearing yellow Star of David armbands. Finally, the Jews are taken en masse to a railroad siding and herded into cattle cars, where they are to wait to be attached to a longer train full of Warsaw Jews. When Rabbi Levin (Richard Hale) urges them to resist, they are gunned down at Grimm's orders. Willie explains to Janina, "They weren't people. They were Jews."

Running through *None Shall Escape* is a conflict reminiscent of *The Mortal Storm*: lack of free choice versus individual human agency. The conflict is especially interesting here because the film systematically attacks the "I was only following orders" defense used by so many actual war criminals at Nuremberg. Father Warecki (Henry Travers) begins his testimony by explicitly challenging this defense: "The trial of these criminals marks a milestone in human history. It is being argued today that we, having defeated the Nazis, should show tolerance and mercy. That these men are the victims of circumstance and of history, and that they enjoyed no freedom to act in accordance of the dictates of their own consciences. I'd like to relate an incident which occurred many years ago to prove that the accused acted of his own volition and that he had freedom of choice and of will." This idea that people have the freedom to make their own choices and create their own destinies is repeated throughout the film. When young Grimm, acquitted of rape charges but humiliated, comes to Father Warecki and Rabbi Levin for money so that he can go back to Germany, the priest tells him, "Today you stand before two roads. Upon one humanity walks in brotherly love and human understanding. On the other run wild the forces of destruction. You started on the wrong road, Grimm, but it's not too late to turn back." This same fork-in-the-road idea is expressed to young Willie by his father, explaining why the family is moving to Austria: "There comes a time in a man's life when he has to make some great decision, and when that time comes for you, I want you to be ready for it." Later, when Father Warecki, Rabbi Levin, and Marja protest the expulsion of Litzbark's Jews, Grimm responds, "I merely carry out orders." Rabbi Levin's speech to his people responds to this abrogation of agency: "We have submitted too long. If we want equality and justice, we must take our place alongside all other oppressed peoples, regardless of race or religion. Their fight is ours, ours is theirs. We haven't much time

left. By our actions we will be remembered. This is our last free choice, our moment in history. I say to you, let us choose to fight. Here! Now!" The beginning of Willie's transformation, his discovery of his own humanity, comes when Marja taunts him after he discovers a wanted man hiding in her basement. She says to him, "You obey orders because you haven't the courage to disobey. You don't dare. . . . Your uncle doesn't dare disobey even though he knows he's wrong. Rabbi Levin made a choice as a free man. But you're afraid. Your father dared." When she tells him to take the man away, Willie responds, "Don't tell me what to do! Nobody can make me do anything I don't want to do! I make my own decisions." Then, surprisingly, he leaves without the fugitive. This claiming of free choice introduces a contradiction into Willie's thinking that eventually leads to his rejection of Nazism and his uncle.

This film, more than any other, takes the distinctions between German and Other, Nazi and "good" German, and reduces them to the level of individual agency. Promoting, submitting to, or resisting Nazism is a matter of individual choice, a choice for which the individual can be held accountable in the projected future, after the war. After years of presenting the horrors Nazis inflict on others, Hollywood presents in *None Shall Escape* its most explicit promise that a reckoning will be made.

Compared to the Germans and Japanese, the Italians were only infrequently depicted in Hollywood films just before and during the war. Shull and Wilt suggest that this may have been because "the Italians were never considered a serious threat."⁵ One might also speculate that the studios were reluctant to alienate the large number of Italian American moviegoers. But as with the portrayal of the Nazis, filmmakers drew on long-established stage and film conventions—most of them comic—to depict Italians as an enemy. These conventions may partly account for the condescending way Italy-as-enemy was shown in these films. Think, for example, of Jack Oakie's portrayal of the Mussolini parody Benzini Napaloni in *The Great Dictator*: blustering, with rustic manners, broken English, and mispronounced words. Or think of Luis Alberni's espionage agent Signor Scarletti in *World Premiere*: officious, inept, and cowardly. These characterizations come out of the same tradition as Chico Marx's stage and film persona. Even in more serious films, Italian characters provide comic relief, such as the talkative and irrelevant Italian liaison to the Vichy French in *Casablanca*. The only Hollywood war films actually set in Italy come late in the war, well after the Italian surrender. *A Walk in the Sun*, made during the war

but not released until December 1945, is set in Italy, but its focus is the psychology of a platoon's men in battle; the setting could be anywhere. *A Bell for Adano* (1945) offers the most sophisticated presentation of the Italian people, but not as an enemy. Rather, they are victims of the war, and the American occupation forces must help them return to normalcy.

The most interesting presentation of an Italian as enemy occurs in *Sahara*, a September 29, 1943, Columbia release. In the film, which takes place in June 1942, an American tank crew, commanded by Sgt. Joe Gunn (Humphrey Bogart) and attached to the British army, is lost in a general retreat. After picking up a diverse collection of stranded allies—including British, French, South African, and even a British Sudanese—they make their way to a well, which they defend against a German motorized unit in an apparently suicidal delaying action. On the way to the well, they pick up two prisoners. The Sudanese, Tambul (Rex Ingram), has an Italian prisoner, Giuseppe (J. Carrol Naish), and the tank crew shoots down a German plane and captures its pilot (Kurt Kreuger). This situation allows the film to contrast the two prisoners and to explore the differences between them as enemies.

When the tank crew picks up Tambul and Giuseppe, Sergeant Gunn orders that the prisoner be given a package of rations and left behind to make his own way out of the desert. He reasons that the large group won't have enough water over the long journey to share with an enemy. Ominously, vultures circle above, already anticipating the Italian's death. Giuseppe begs to be taken along, and in the process, he turns himself from an enemy, an Other, into an individual. He offers to show Gunn a photograph of his wife and child and tells the group that he can speak English—he studied it in school and practices by reading letters from his wife's uncle's cousin, who lives in America. He says, "He work now in Pittsburgh, U.S.A., in the steel factory. Maybe he make the steel for this tank in Pittsburgh, U.S.A." Gunn resists this attempt at connection-making and individualization, refusing to look at the picture and trying to keep the man objectified: "I'm not taking on a load of spaghetti." He finally relents when he sees Giuseppe stumbling helplessly and pathetically in the trail of the tank's treads.

After the tank reaches the well, where Gunn and the men hope to make a stand, Giuseppe gradually becomes less a prisoner and more a member of the group. Having been a mechanic in civilian life, he offers to help Gunn work on the tank, and the offer is gratefully accepted. A little

later, when the French member of the group, Jean “Frenchy” Leroux (Louis Mercier), fantasizes about the cheese made in his hometown and describes how one eats it (“a little cheese, a little bread, then you wash your throat with wine”), Giuseppe hesitantly suggests adding a little onion to the sequence, and Frenchy obliges; Giuseppe is allowed to participate in the fantasy and, in effect, is welcomed into the group. While working on the tank, Gunn asks Giuseppe about life under Mussolini; his response reveals both an interesting self-conscious awareness of how fascist ideology is reproduced in its subjects and a recognition of the necessity of submitting to it. He says of Mussolini, “He tells me he knows best. Everywhere he writes his mottoes, on the walls, on the street, so we got them in the brain, and we must believe these mottoes. . . . Obey. Believe. Work.” When Gunn suggests that Mussolini thinks he’s God, Giuseppe explains, “Yes, he thinks, but I think maybe Hitler is God, and Mussolini is just his prophet.” But he ends this commentary with a weary acceptance: “For some people is alright to laugh at Il Duce, but when you got a wife and a baby, is no good to laugh.” In films about the transmission of Nazi ideology to the populace, we saw some characters who embraced Nazism, some who accepted it out of fear, and some who recognized the processes by which it was being propagated and in large or small ways resisted it. Giuseppe, representing Italians, seems to do all three at once, suggesting a fundamental difference between Germans and Italians: Italians may embrace Mussolini’s fascism, but they embrace it with a self-conscious fatalism because there seems to be no alternative.

One of the mistakes the film’s characters make is not to recognize the differences between their two prisoners, the German and the Italian. When they capture the German pilot, there’s no debate about whether to take him along or leave him in the desert to die, even though he has attacked them and fatally wounded one of them. The unspoken logic seems to be that they should treat him just as they’ve treated the Italian. As they go along, however, whereas Giuseppe becomes individualized, makes connections to the allies, offers to help, and becomes part of the group, the German hides his knowledge of English, insists on his superiority to the allies (especially Tambul), works constantly to undermine the group, and remains more a type than an individual. When the German and Giuseppe are imprisoned together, he tries to force the Italian to help him escape and betray the allies. Giuseppe responds with the clearest statement not only of the differences between Germany and Italy but also of the antagonism:

Italians are not like Germans. Only the party wears the uniform and not the soul. Mussolini is not so clever like Hitler. He can dress his Italians up only to *look* like thieves, cheats, murderers. He cannot like Hitler make them feel like that. He cannot like Hitler scrape from their conscience the knowledge right is right and wrong is wrong, or dig holes in their heads to plant his own ten commandments: steal from thy neighbor, cheat thy neighbor, kill thy neighbor. . . .

Are my eyes blind that I must fall to my knees to worship a maniac who has made of my country a concentration camp? Who has made of my people slaves? Must I kiss the hand that beats me? Lick the boot that kicks me? No! I rather spend my whole life living in this dusty hole than escape to fight again for things I do not believe, against people I do not hate. As for your Hitler, it's because of men like him that God—my God—created hell.

The German then stabs Giuseppe, but he manages to report the Nazi's escape before he dies.

A prewar film, *Sundown* (1941), presents a similar Italian character and puts him to similar uses. This United Artists film focuses on colonial officials in British East Africa trying to prevent a native uprising inspired by and supported with guns from an unspecified foreign power, presumably Germany. When Major Coombes (George Sanders) arrives from Nairobi at the outpost of Manieka, he is shocked to see an unconfined Italian prisoner, Captain Pallini (Joseph Calleia). District Commissioner Crawford (Bruce Cabot) explains, "We hardly regard Pallini as a prisoner." Nor does Pallini regard himself that way: "I am not a prisoner of war. I give myself up—and that is different." Indeed, even the priggish Coombes comes to see that the man is no threat and is more valuable in the kitchen preparing meals than in the lockup. Though not to be taken seriously as an enemy, Pallini is in many ways more savvy about Africa than the British, and in a key scene he explains to them the danger of the potential uprising and, at the same time, reveals (as Giuseppe did) the Italians' underlying dissatisfaction with fascism, Italian or German style. Like Giuseppe, Pallini is given a prewar civilian vocation; he had been a teacher of political history in Milan but was sent to Africa because, he says, "I teach too much." His theory is that the German plan of conquest depends on Africa as a land bridge to the rest of the world: "Here in Africa is your key of everything. If you lose Africa, you lose the war, you lose the world." He adds, "I know I look like a coward because I give myself up and do not fight you."

But where there is power there can only be one master. And I know what that means to my people too. To all people." Like Giuseppe, Pallini is murdered by a German but manages to leave a message to help the British before he dies.

These films suggest that the Italians are less like an enemy than a friendly country occupied by hostile German forces. Fundamental flaws in the Italian character—a pathetic temerity, a willingness to bend with the prevailing wind—have led to the Mussolini regime and its partnership with Nazi Germany. The Italians are not so much a threat to us as they are a victimized people who need to be rescued.

The December 22, 1941, issue of *Time* offered a sidebar titled "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs," with helpful hints for distinguishing Chinese from Japanese, including the following: "Chinese, not as hairy as Japanese, seldom grow an impressive mustache," and "the Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant." The fact that *Time* published this sidebar suggests a widespread confusion over the difference between the Japanese and other Asian nationalities, a confusion that offered a challenge to Hollywood as well.

The Japanese, in one sense, were easier to construct as Other than the Germans and Italians. They looked different from the average American of European extraction, and they did not share a cultural and religious heritage with most Americans. However, this Othering process also presented some problems. Prior to World War II, American popular culture made use of Asian stereotypes and stock characters, just as it had German and Italian stock figures, but there were few specifically *Japanese* stereotypes. Compare the title characters of two popular 1930s mystery series, Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto. Chan, the Chinese detective, as played by Warner Oland and Sidney Toler, and Moto, the Japanese detective, as played by Peter Lorre, are very much alike: polite to the point of obsequiousness, modest and self-effacing but concealing great intellect and a host of skills.⁶ The probably inadvertent conflation of Japanese and Chinese is made explicit in *Doomed to Die* (1940), a film in the Mr. Wong series, starring Boris Karloff as a Chinese detective. At one point, annoying female reporter Bobbie Logan (Marjorie Reynolds) suggests that a murdered Chinese smuggler must have committed suicide: "Well, Wong, an Oriental would, wouldn't he? You know, commit hara kiri, or whatever you call it." The humor here comes not from Bobbie's ascribing a Japanese practice to a Chinese man but because the man had been stabbed in the back. The

general Asian stereotype, manifested in all three film detectives, was used in Hollywood depictions of the Japanese—with the characteristic of deceptive appearances turned from an admirable to a negative quality—but filmmakers needed to find a way to construct a film image of the Japanese that would be distinct from other Asians—Filipinos, Burmese, and Koreans, whose lands were occupied by the Japanese, and especially our Chinese allies.

The picture of the Japanese that developed in Hollywood films early in the war seems to have evolved out of four main sources. The first is the stereotype of obsequious modesty discussed earlier. Filmmakers simply twisted this slightly to suggest a false modesty hiding aggression, a deceitful appearance masking evil. The second source is the news reports that had been coming out of China for several years. These reports of Japanese brutality against a helpless civilian population had excited sympathy but little outrage among most Americans before Pearl Harbor, but afterward they offered a ready supply of images to characterize the Japanese fighting man. Susan D. Moeller demonstrates how, after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. press quickly and easily demonized the Japanese as untrustworthy, brutal, and subhuman.⁷ The third source is a construction of the attack on Pearl Harbor that was being promoted as early as December 8 in President Roosevelt's speech to Congress requesting a declaration of war. The president characterized the attack as a betrayal and the Japanese as a treacherous people. After announcing the attack by Japan, he said,

The United States was at peace with that Nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American Island of Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace. . . .

But always will our whole Nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.⁸

This construction of the Japanese as untrustworthy and as operating outside the rules of war worked with the stereotype of deceitful appearances and the news reports of brutality in China to create an idea of the Japanese that would be at work in one way or another in every film about the war in the Pacific.

As we noted in chapter 2, the war against Japan caught the Hollywood studios by surprise. Filmmakers needed a ready set of narrative conventions and character types on which to draw when creating their stories about the Japanese. We think that consciously or unconsciously they drew on a fourth source, conventions and techniques that had been used to depict another group that had been considered an enemy in American popular culture practically from the founding of the colonies—the American Indian. If this seems far-fetched, consider that the connection between the Asian and Indian characters had been made in American popular culture 100 years before Pearl Harbor. In *The Deerslayer* (1841) James Fenimore Cooper uses the following simile to describe a Native American in the process of bargaining with a white man: “The effect on this rude being of the forest was an exclamation of surprise; then such a smile of courtesy and wave of the hand succeeded as would have done credit to Asiatic diplomacy.”⁹ Indeed, one can look to Cooper’s novels, especially the Leatherstocking series, for a clear articulation of how American popular culture constructed the idea of the Indian. The Indian was more intimately connected with nature than the white man was, which made him both comfortable in uncivilized areas where whites felt lost, frightened, and threatened and closer to an animal than a human being. The Indian’s nature and social system encouraged brutal atrocities, including scalping and torture, against enemies. The Indian believed that his tribe was superior to all other tribes and to the white man. The Indian lived by an eccentric and hard-to-understand system of honor but, at the same time, was treacherous and not to be trusted. These characteristics reigned in the popular presentation of Indians well into the 1960s, most prominently in Hollywood Westerns. World War II-era audiences were already familiar with the presentation of these characteristics and knew what to think of them; it was fairly easy to transfer them to a new enemy. A telling example is *Manila Calling* (1942), which adapts Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan’s famous remark, “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead,” to the

Japanese. On being informed that a crashed Japanese pilot is dead, Lucky Matthews (Lloyd Nolan) says, "Well, that's one good Jap." In *China Sky* (1945) Chinese guerrilla leader Chen-Ta (Anthony Quinn) recasts this same remark: "We have learned that among the East Ocean dwarfs the good are of two kinds—the dead and the unborn." This film even ends like a Western, with a wild shootout in a Chinese town between its defenders and Japanese paratroopers, complete with men on rooftops dramatically falling to the street and Chen-Ta's cavalry riding in to save the day.

We can see many of these characteristics being applied to the Japanese in *Bataan*, a May 28, 1943, MGM release. Like several of the Pacific-theater films we discussed in chapter 2, *Bataan* is set amid actual historical events: the retreat down the Bataan peninsula and the fall of the Philippines. A thirteen-man patrol is assigned to keep the Japanese from crossing a ravine for as long as possible; there is little chance that they will receive orders to withdraw. The film assures us that although they are "getting killed holding onto some place you never heard of," their delaying action is invaluable to the United States. We're told, "The men who died here may have done more than we'll ever know to save this whole world." But beyond these tropes for justifying the war in the Pacific, the film spends much of its time defining the Japanese as enemies. The idea is established in the first exchange of dialogue. Corp. Jake Feingold (Thomas Mitchell), helping to cover a stream of retreating civilians and wounded soldiers, takes careful aim at something high in a tree and shoots. His sergeant, Bill Dane (Robert Taylor), tells him that it was a monkey. Feingold responds, "Well, I missed him anyway. I'd hate to hit him by mistake for a Jap." Later, after a sniper kills the commanding officer, Dane warns the remaining men, "You better know right now those no-tailed baboons out there are . . . number-one skillful. They climb trees better than monkeys, got all the best trees marked on their maps. They can live and fight for a month on what wouldn't last one of you guys two days." These are just two of many instances when the characters refer to the Japanese as animals; they are most often called monkeys but are also called fleas, possums, and rats. Moreover, in the film's climactic scene, as Dane, the last surviving member of the patrol, prepares for the enemy's final assault, we see the Japanese soldiers slithering through the ground mist like snakes.

These references create an idea of the Japanese as less than human, but they also suggest that the Japanese are somehow more at home in a natural environment, such as the tropical jungle setting, than the Americans

are. The patrol chooses a grove as its headquarters because it provides “some natural advantages. Being up on that shelf ought to give us some protection. That cliff at the back ought to help us a lot.” But ominously, the grove’s water supply is undrinkable—too many germs. Nature thus presents a threat as well as safety. The film develops this idea further as the Japanese threat becomes synonymous with the jungle setting. We don’t see the Japanese soldiers until about two-thirds of the way into the film, and only once in close-up. Instead, for most of the film, the threat is invisible: snipers’ bullets come without warning from somewhere among the trees; men who wander too far from the safety of the camp are found dead; when the Japanese finally mount an all-out charge on the patrol, they disguise themselves as bushes and trees, so it appears that the jungle itself is attacking. In contrast, the Americans are clearly out of their environment in the jungle. One man, Matowski (Barry Nelson)—a city boy from Pittsburgh who can’t wait to get back there—is ordered to duplicate the Japanese trick of climbing a tree to observe the enemy, but he is immediately shot.

This association between the Japanese and the threatening natural setting, as opposed to an urban, presumably civilized setting, connects with the film’s presentation of Japanese duplicity. The Americans complain that the Japanese refuse to come out into the open and fight fairly. Instead, they snipe at the patrol, picking off the careless and the weak. When they do attack in a frontal charge, the five remaining Americans drive them back, killing dozens of them. But even in this battle, Japanese treachery comes into play. One Japanese soldier motions as if to surrender, and when his American attacker hesitates he nearly kills him. After the battle, a Japanese soldier pretending to be dead manages to kill two of the three remaining Americans. Throughout, the Japanese are cunning, cruel, and not to be trusted.

The duplicity and treachery of the Japanese are stressed in almost every film about the war in the Pacific. Filmmakers make this point through the repeated use of four basic tropes. The first, of course, is the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, rarely depicted but referred to continually. The second comes from President Roosevelt’s address to Congress: the fact that the Japanese ambassador and a special envoy from Tokyo were still involved in negotiations with the secretary of state when the attack on Pearl Harbor was launched. The special envoy even appears in *Wake Island*, where he is feted during a stopover on his way to Washington. The third is the presentation of Japanese officers who were educated in the

United States and then returned to Japan to use their knowledge against America. This suggests both a betrayal and the comforting notion that the Japanese couldn't compete with us were it not for the knowledge they acquired in the West. The fourth is the reminder of the relief provided by the United States after the devastating earthquake in 1923. This presents the Japanese as having repaid American compassion and kindness with violence.

The construction of the Japanese as untrustworthy is best seen in one of the most vitriolic anti-Japanese films of the war years, *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* A Twentieth Century-Fox B picture, *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* was released on July 8, 1942, only seven months after Pearl Harbor. As a result, it participates in the West Coast anti-Japanese hysteria of the war's early months. Set in the days just before and just after Pearl Harbor, its plot follows a Los Angeles police detective, Michael Steele (Preston Foster), as he investigates a Japanese spy ring working to prepare for the invasion of the mainland United States. Although the film reminds us several times—at the insistence of the Office of War Information, according to Shull and Wilt¹⁰—that many Japanese Americans are loyal, the film's blatant message is that they are not. In the opening scene, as the head of the Los Angeles spy ring, Takimura (Harold Huber), receives his orders from his superiors in Tokyo, he explains, "I was born in the United States and consequently enjoy the privileges of citizenship, but, as you know, I am pledged to the service of the son of heaven, our emperor." His leader answers, "That is the case with many of our countrymen." Even when the film avers that many Japanese are loyal Americans, it undercuts itself, suggesting instead that they may not be. At one point Steele's captain (J. Farrell MacDonald) tries to convince him that he's imagining a conspiracy: "The Japanese are harmless, peaceful, industrious citizens. They're loyal, too, most of them. Of course, there may be some rats in the bunch, but that's nothing to get excited about. I was reading only this morning that 93 percent of the vegetable crop of California is in the control of the Japanese." Steele responds, "Yeah, I know. They've got farms right next to all the airplane factories and the dams and the oil storage concentrations. . . . Those farmers are subsidized by the Japanese Specie Bank, straight from Tokyo. Why?" Later, after Pearl Harbor, we see footage of "dangerous aliens" being rounded up, but the Japanese Americans shown putting up "We Are Loyal U.S. Citizens" signs in their shops are all characters that we know are involved in the spy ring.

At the end of the film, after Steele has broken up the spy ring, we see

a newspaper headline that reads, “All Japs to Be Evacuated,” followed by actual footage of Japanese American citizens, with their belongings, being marched away from their homes and bused to the Santa Anita racetrack. (Interestingly, this is one of the few films of the time that acknowledges the evacuation and internment of Japanese American citizens.) Another newspaper headline reads, “Last Japs Leave L.A. Area Today: Military Area Cleared of Possible Saboteurs.” In the final scene, the film’s ultimate judgment on the detention and the loyalty of Japanese Americans is made known through the character of Steele’s girlfriend, Maris Hanover (Brenda Joyce), a radio reporter. Surrounded by docile Japanese, apparently in the process of being evacuated, and with “My County ’Tis of Thee” playing in the background, she reports,

And so in the interests of national safety, all Japanese, whether citizens or not, are being evacuated from strategic military zones on the Pacific coast. Unfortunately, in time of war the loyal must suffer inconvenience with the disloyal. . . .

America’s attitude toward this wholesale evacuation can best be summed up, I believe, by the last four lines of a poem by Robert Nathan entitled “Watch America”:

God, who gave our fathers freedom,
 God, who made our fathers brave,
 What they built with love and anguish,
 Let our children watch and save.

Be vigilant, America.

The film argues that although some Japanese may be loyal, they are so few in number that it is safer to assume that no Japanese can be trusted. We risk our own security by regarding them with anything but suspicion.

The paranoia about Japanese treachery exhibited in *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* is perhaps understandable in the confusing months after the first Japanese attacks in the Pacific. Yet the theme of Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals living in U.S. territory being disloyal and potential saboteurs recurs in films throughout the war. In John Ford and Gregg Toland’s documentary *December 7th* (released in an edited version in 1943; the complete version wasn’t made available until 1991), a complacent, prewar Uncle Sam (Walter Huston) is warned by Mr. C (Harry Davenport) about the

Japanese living in Hawaii; their number, their embrace of Japanese culture, and their resistance to assimilation are suspicious, he implies. As in *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.*, there is some acknowledgment that most Japanese living in U.S. territories are loyal, but the overall impression left with the viewer is that they are not to be trusted. In the Three Stooges short *The Yoke's on Me* (1944) the boys, while working on a farm to grow food for the war effort, are threatened by three Japanese who have escaped from an internment camp—another rare reference to the internment of the Japanese. Interestingly, the escapees are presented as violently dangerous, as if they were criminals escaped from prison; they are even dressed in striped prison-style clothing. As late as 1945, *Betrayal from the East* presented American con man Lee Tracy being recruited by a huge prewar, West Coast Japanese spy ring to steal the defense plans for the Panama Canal. Again, the spies are shown as having insinuated themselves into all aspects of American life to gain information useful to the Japanese war machine and to implement sabotage efforts once the war begins. Even the postwar *Samurai* (1945) continues to make the case for Japanese American treachery. Here a California couple adopts a Japanese boy after the 1923 earthquake. Though they try to raise him as an American, he comes under the influence of the Bushido philosophy. As an adult (Paul Fung), he becomes the leader of a spy ring preparing for the invasion of California. Over and over again these films make the point that the Japanese, no matter how polite, helpful, or assimilated they may appear, harbor an unwavering loyalty to Japan that will cause them to lie, steal, betray, and kill.

Yet Japanese treachery is presented in the context of an arcane and eccentric system of honor that outsiders, especially Americans, can't understand. This is best seen in another Doolittle raid film, *The Purple Heart*, released by Twentieth Century-Fox on February 23, 1944. The story is based on the Doolittle raiders who were captured by the Japanese. Here, they are put on trial in a Tokyo civil court for murdering civilians during the April 18, 1942, bombing of Japanese cities. The evidence is clearly trumped up; the real purpose of the trial is to discover the base from which the raiders launched their attack. The fliers withstand torture and a final offer of their lives in exchange for the information. The film ends with them marching off to their executions.

But much of the film is also about the Japanese idea of honor. In the wake of the Doolittle raid, the honor of the military has been marred by the attack on the cities, especially Tokyo, the emperor's home. The honor of the navy is threatened by the accusation that the attack was launched

from aircraft carriers inside the Japanese defense perimeter. The honor of chief investigator and prosecutor General Mitsubi (Richard Loo) is staked on his claim that the raid was launched from an aircraft carrier. The importance of honor is emphasized in the exaggeratedly polite rhetoric with which Mitsubi and his navy antagonist, Admiral Yamagichi (Keye Chang), argue their points; neither wants to seem to be impugning the honor of the other. In objecting to the general's theory, Yamagichi says, "General Mitsubi, your brilliance in matters of military investigation is famous throughout the empire. I therefore rebuke myself for calling to your attention certain matters which you must already have investigated most exhaustively." Later, the general vows, "If it is proved that I am in error, I shall feel that I have falsely accused the Imperial Navy of negligence, and I shall apologize with my life."

But the civility with which the idea of honor is expressed masks the brutality and treachery—seen in the torture and psychological manipulation the Japanese use to try to get the fliers to confess—that are fundamental to the system. This corruption at the heart of the Japanese system, a corruption that is masked by beautiful things, is revealed at several points in the film. The trial is conducted with a strict sense of ritual and ceremony and with repeated references to the guiding authority of law and the emperor, yet the presiding judge and the court clerk coarsely shout their remarks like petty tyrants. Moreover, the so-called rule of law allows clearly false evidence to be introduced and effectively prevents it from being challenged. The absurdity of the illusion of Japanese civility is perhaps best punctured when the fliers are taken to their cell—a small space for seven of them, with no chairs or cots—and they are ordered to remove their shoes before entering.

The scene that best represents the inaccessibly foreign nature of Japanese honor—in concept and practice—occurs when the trial is interrupted by the news that Corregidor has fallen. The judges leap about like delighted children and run from the room to join the celebration in the streets, and the military officers present begin a samurai sword dance, a strange combination of dance and fighting. The film, classically realistic up to this point, becomes almost expressionistic here. Strangely angled close-ups of the officers pulling out their swords and preparing to do battle alternate with close-ups of the Americans' faces showing fear (are they going to kill us?) and astonishment (what on earth are they doing?). The lighting then casts weird, elongated shadows of the swordplay behind and over the Americans. The film style here forces the audience to share the fliers' disbelief

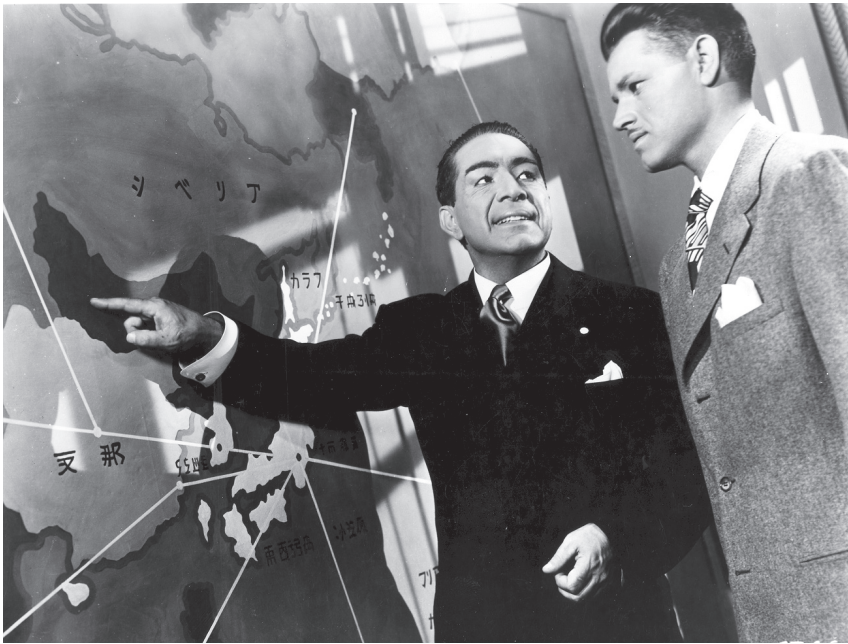


The Purple Heart: General Mitsubi (Richard Loo) menaces captured Doolittle raiders (including Dana Andrews and Sam Levene). Note the shadows of the samurai sword dance.

and incomprehension. One is left with the impression that we will never be able to understand these people.

The vast majority of Hollywood World War II films about the Japanese explicitly or implicitly reach this same conclusion: as a people and as a culture, the Japanese are so completely foreign, so Other, that Americans cannot understand them, only fight them. *Behind the Rising Sun* is an exception—in fact, it's unique in our viewing—in that it makes distinctions among different types of Japanese, some of whom are admirable, much as the films *The Mortal Storm*, *Underground*, *Hitler's Children*, and *The Seventh Cross* make distinctions among Germans. The film, based on a book of the same name by James R. Young, a nonfiction account of the author's time in prewar Japan, was released by RKO on July 21, 1943. It is narrated by Reo Seki (J. Carrol Naish), a newspaper editor turned propaganda minister who is writing a letter to his son Taro (Tom Neal), recently killed in action, to explain how their country and each of them have changed and, especially, how Taro turned from a decent human being into a monster.

The film employs many of the same elements we've seen in other



Behind the Rising Sun: “Japan is the very center of the universe.” Reo Seki (J. Carrol Naish) explains Japan’s plans for world conquest to his son Taro (Tom Neal).

films about the Japanese as enemy. It shows the Japanese as brutal; indeed, this film is particularly horrific, with its scenes of Japanese atrocities in China, including the bayoneting of babies, and the torture of American residents of Tokyo after Pearl Harbor. It shows the Japanese sense of superiority to the rest of the world, when, at one point, Seki explains to his son Japan’s plan for world domination: “Japan is the very center of the universe.” We see an example of the Japanese code of honor, which Americans don’t understand, in the duel by proxy between Taro and an American engineer, O’Hara (Don Douglas). Representing O’Hara is Lefty (Robert Ryan), the American manager of a local baseball team, who expects a boxing match; representing Taro is a wrestler and judo expert (Mike Mazurki) who is expected to fight to the death. We also see the beneficial influence of America on the Japanese. Both Seki and Taro were educated in the United States; as the film goes to flashback, Taro is just returning to Japan after graduating from Cornell. Tama (Margo), Taro’s fiancée, is fascinated with America, remembering the help provided by the Red Cross after the 1923 earthquake.

Combined with these familiar elements, however, are a number of other themes, more often seen in the film treatment of Nazi Germany. We see, at least briefly, something of the rise of militarism in Japan, as the army silences or assassinates the liberal elements of society. Early in the film, an army officer (Philip Ahn) murders Takahashi (Fred Essler), the “last liberal” in Japan, because he is a “foreigner”; like the Nazis, the Japanese militarists can tolerate no dissent from their views and so make those who would disagree Other, foreigners, to purify society. This desire for a pure society becomes evident in the methods of repression that develop during the film, from subtle to blatant, and in the always disguised but always present thought-control police. It is also evident in the way the American influence, which is seemingly everywhere in Tokyo, is twisted to serve Japanese militaristic needs. Between two games of a doubleheader—American baseball—the ballplayers and military band march around the stadium. In disgust, Lefty paraphrases the announcer’s words: “Baseball isn’t just baseball anymore. They mustn’t come here to enjoy it just as a sport. They must come here to enjoy it as a military exercise.” The romantic atmosphere of an American-style nightclub is shattered when military officers, reacting to the news of the Marco Polo Bridge incident, which provided an excuse for Japan’s invasion of China, begin a samurai sword dance. After Pearl Harbor, the American influence is erased altogether. The engineer O’Hara is arrested as a spy for having plans of important Japanese buildings in his office—buildings he designed and built.

This manipulation and eventual erasure of things American mirrors the transformation of Taro. Taro returns from his college experience in the United States with American slang, American habits, and American ideas. Though he presumably hasn’t been away from Japan for very many years, he has forgotten many Japanese customs, such as how to greet his father and removing his shoes when he enters his father’s home. Rather than follow the path his father has prepared for him, he wants to work for the American O’Hara and marry Tama, despite her inferior social level. The film demonstrates how a decent, reasonably liberal young man like Taro can be transformed into a closed-minded, militaristic nationalist by a dehumanizing, totalitarian social environment. After Taro resists Seki’s explanation of Japan’s destiny of world domination and his father’s plans for his participation in it, Seki echoes the phrase we hear from so many defenders of Nazism in films about Germany: “There is nothing to talk over. You will see, my son. You have no choice.” Soon after, Taro is drafted into the army as an engineer and is sent to China. He begins by defending

some of the Chinese civilians from mistreatment by the Japanese soldiers, but after a while he tries to just ignore the atrocities and ends by participating in them. He returns to Tokyo hard and cold, a militarist and a nationalist. He requests a transfer from the engineers to the air force so that he can be more actively engaged in the fighting. Seeing his son's transformation, Seki becomes disenchanted with Japan's ambitions. He explains to O'Hara:

I have made a great mistake. There will be war with America. There is nothing I can do to stop it. . . . I can see now things I never could see before. We are not fit to rule the world. We have come of age too quickly. . . . Would I be so concerned if I thought Japan would lose? If that were so, there would be nothing to fear. No, it is because she will win that I am afraid, afraid for the whole civilized world. . . . You have seen what Japan has done to my son, haven't you? Yes, I know, I was responsible too. I used to say let's line up race against race, color against color. But I hadn't counted on this. I tell you, O'Hara, we're playing with the kind of fire no man in his right mind should ever touch. It destroys the victor as well as the vanquished. Today, my son is nothing more than a savage. Already he has asked for more active duty in the air corps. He wants to kill now for the sheer joy of killing.

In short, Taro has become the kind of Japanese we see in the jungles of *Bataan*, the spy ring of *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.*, and the torture chambers of *The Purple Heart*.

But interestingly, not all the Japanese characters are like Taro. His father obviously regrets his role in the militarist government. He uses his influence to help O'Hara and the other arrested Americans escape the country, and, in atonement for helping to destroy his son and for the mad acts of his country, he commits seppuku. But more important is Tama, who is fascinated with America from the beginning and is willing to question Japanese traditions. Because of this, she is arrested with the Americans after Pearl Harbor, and Seki also arranges for her passage out of the country. She refuses to leave, however, explaining, "All my life I wanted to go to America, but that must wait now. My place is here. . . . I know there isn't very much I can do alone. But someday, perhaps, we will be delivered by those who are free, and it will be important that there are some of us here who understand the world outside, and a few outside who understand Japan—the Japan that is yet to be born." The implication is that when the

United States wins the war, there will be some “good” Japanese ready to work with us to rebuild the country. In an interesting reversal, Hollywood, which has been committed to Othering the Japanese in order to define them as our enemy, projects a postwar world where the peace will be built with Japanese who want to be like us.

The claim that some Japanese can be like us is rare in Hollywood films, however. Whereas the construction of the Germans as enemies is, as a whole, done with some distinctions among the good and the bad, overall, the Japanese as a people are presented as practically inhuman. This can be seen in a B picture from RKO released only days after the Japanese surrender, *First Yank into Tokyo*. It concerns an American officer (Tom Neal) who undergoes irreversible plastic surgery to look Japanese so that he can infiltrate a prison camp and bring out a scientist needed to work on the atomic bomb. He also manages to save his girlfriend, a nurse, but as they are about to board a rescue boat, he decides to stay behind, sacrificing himself to save the others, because he can't imagine living the rest of his life looking Japanese. He explains, “Abby and I could never be happy. I'm saddled with this [indicating his Japanese features]. Every time she looked at me, I'd remind her of the other Japs on Bataan and Corregidor. We couldn't find any happiness together.” The film presents the assertion that it's better to be dead than to look Japanese.

Hollywood films, then, employed a complex process involving preexisting pop-cultural representations, recent events, and ideological comparisons and contrasts to construct an idea of the countries we were at war with to help the American public understand why they had to be defeated. In the next two chapters we will see that filmmakers used a similar process to engage a more complicated problem: helping Americans understand why they had to fight for our allies.