

Memorandum

To: Dr. Goody
From:
Date: 18 April 2017
Subject: Memo about film

Opening Segment

You have asked me to write a memo to discuss the film *Conspiracy*, in order to determine if the film should be used to teach the Holocaust. Teaching the Holocaust in high school is really important and films are so popular with students, it's a good way to teach. You can teach and entertain at the same time. In this memo, I will explain to you how filmmakers are claiming to do history accurately. I will then tell you about the film's messages. Also, I will share with you insights about how reviewers judged the film.

Body

The film makes vast claims to historical veracity in its production and how the Press Release shaped announcements about the release date and reviews of *Conspiracy*.

The press release talks about the history of the Wannsee Conference. It noted that the screenwriter did research. It also told about how the actors did research for their roles. They quoted Kenneth Branagh and Stanley Tucci extensively. *Variety* reported that the Holocaust Museum aired the show. In doing so, this must be proof that the film was historically accurate.

So this film was also aired in Great Britain for the first time a few months later. This was done on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Wannsee Conference. In the days leading up to the film's release in the British Isles, much lengthier history lessons about Wannsee, the decision to exterminate European Jewry, and the killing methods were offered to reading audiences.

This film is about how the Wannsee Conference meeting went down. At that meeting lots of top Nazis were attending. It showed how evil and crass these men were they were deciding to kill Jews. The lesson that students should take from watching the film: that the Nazis were bad men who enjoyed eating good food, drink wine, and smoke while heartlessly debate the details of how to kill Jews.

The film reviewers were largely positive about the movie. John Koch wrote a negative review seeming to be offended by the humor in the film. He strikes me as bit overly-sensitive. He also criticized the choice of Stanley Tucci to play Adolf Eichmann. But his criticism was unfair.

A positive review is offered by the historian Alan Steinweis. He really enjoyed the movie. He said the film "does not stray very far from what is factually plausible. The main danger with this kind of film is that most viewers will not be able to tell the difference between plausible speculation and documented fact."¹ Steinweis shares the concerns that many historians would have. In one British review, the author Robert Hanks described the film as "sharply understated moments ..., undercutting any two-dimensional caricatures of evil

¹ Steinweis, Review, 675.

Nazis." The example offered is when Heydrich speaks of the beauty of Schubert's quintet in C.²

By the time the *Conspiracy* aired in Great Britain, Branagh had won Best Actor Daytime Emmy Award. The Golden Globes had awarded Loring Mandel with best screenplay and Stanley Tucci for playing Adolf Eichmann.³

Overall, the film receives more positive reviews than negative, especially when we take into account the British reception of the film in January 2002. High School students won't be entertained or engaged while watch a meeting play out on the screen. So I would not show it.

Concluding Segment

If you have time to show only one full-feature film in class, do not make it this one. Really, it was dry, lacking any action scenes, and students will tune out.

² Robert Hanks,

³ "Review: ... The art of darkness: Kenneth Branagh is at his best ..." *The Observer*

Annotated Bibliography of Historical Sources

The "Final Solution": The Wannsee Conference (January 20, 1942). Jewish Virtual Library. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-wannsee-conference> accessed 29 March 2017
Offers a historical introduction to the Wannsee Protocol and access to the full text.

House of the Wannsee Conference: Memorial and Educational Site.
This website offers a number of primary sources from the weeks leading up to the Wannsee Conference including the English translation of the Wannsee Protocol (20 January 1942).

Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*. New York: Picador, 2003.
In this monograph, Roseman explains the history of the origins of the decision for the "final solution."

Wannsee Conference and the "Final Solution". United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005477> accessed on 29 March 2017
An encyclopedia article that offers a general history of the conference and its significance in the decision for the final solution.

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