

Schindler's list essay



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The Holocaust was the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews of Nazi occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945. Six million Jews were savagely murdered as a result. Most were sent to concentration and death camps where they were forced into harsh labour, and if they were not capable of undertaking this, they were shot or gassed. At first the Nazis merely boycotted Jewish shops, disallowing trade between Aryans and the Jews. The Nazi regime then went a step further with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which took away Jews German citizenship, their jobs and their right to marry or have sexual relations with a non-Jew.

In 1938 Jewish shops were looted and synagogues burnt, this was later to become known as ' Krystallnacht'. The following year Ghettoisation occurred, a process by which all Jews were herded into special sealed off areas. In September 1939 World War 2 broke out and under cover of this war, SS Einsatzgruppen carried out a policy of extermination in Eastern Europe, ' The Holocaust'. The Wansee Conference of 1941 systemised this slaughter by putting forward the Final Solution - Annihilation of all European Jews in Death Camps in Poland and elsewhere. Only German defeat in World War 2 brought this horrific genocide to an end.

Schindlers list' - a cinematic portrayal of the Holocaust - makes it very clear that the Nazis strongly disliked the Jewish people, as evidenced, by their speech, attitudes and actions. The Nazis, in the film seek to de-humanise the Jews referring to them as " a virus", " bacterium" and " cargo units", Goeth explains that, " They cast a spell on you". We also witness Goeth telling his Jewish maid, Helen Hirsch, " You are not human in the strictest sense of the word" and blaming her for his attraction to her, he hits her and calls her " a

Jewish bitch". This is a comparison of the Jews to animals, which is continued throughout the film.

This film's focussing on Goeth's sadism is one of its main features, in one scene he shoots workers at random from his balcony, out of sadistic pleasure and to terrorise them into working harder. Goeth also shoots a female Jewish engineer for contradicting her German superiors, calling her a " fucking bitch" as he walks away from her dead body. Goeth also comments to his colleagues, " They don't have a future, its policy now" and " You're giving them hope - now that's cruel. " Schindlers Jewish accountant, Itzak Sterne, confirms this view of Goeth's sadism, " Goeth likes killing".

In another scene, as Schindler asks Goeth what he will do with Helen Hirsh after the war, Goeth tries to be ' kind' by saying, " I'll take her out into the woods and shoot her painlessly" this is further evidence of the Nazi dehumanisation of the Jews. In one scene we witness Nazi soldiers jeering at an Orthodox Jew and cutting his hair to humiliate him. Even at the end of the film, when Goeth is just about to be hanged, he calls out, " Heil Hitler", to show that he has no remorse. He has dehumanised himself, as the evil crimes he committed are almost inhuman.

The film makes it clear that the purpose of the concentration camps were to isolate the Jews from society, demoralise them, force them to undertake labour and eventually to exterminate them. The film highlights that many Jews did not think that they would be killed -" Why would they kill their own workforce? " But others realised what was going to happen and tried to escape and to survive. In one scene a young girl shouts, " Goodbye Jew" and

a young boy runs his hand across his throat as the Jews are sent to a death camp. Spielberg is making it clear to us that the outside world knew what was happening to them.

The actual concentration camps were very unhygienic and filthy, with little food available. The Jewish inmates slept three to a bunk in large, cold shed-like buildings. In addition the inmates are faced with a constant fear of death and are surrounded by sentries in watchtowers, as well as guard dogs and barbwire fences. Once in the camps, Jewish children are separated from their parents and exterminated first, as they represent the next generation of Jews. However, guards tried to stop parents being alarmed by not shooting the children that tried to run away, rather they hunt them down silently.

The Nazis led the children into a false sense of security by providing play parks equipped with swings and slides, so that when they loaded them into the vans the children go willingly, laughing and smiling. Yet, it was obvious that they were being taken away to be killed. By the time their parents realise what is happening it is too late. One memorable scene from the film we see a small Jewish girl - highlighted by the use of colour, in this black and white film - who comes to symbolize hope, later we see her corpse being carried away in a scene which seems to signify that the Jews have no hope left.

A scene in which Goeth initially pardons a Jewish boy who could not clean his bath properly confirms this, the boy walks away from the house and Goeth shoots him in a display of sadism. The Jews themselves are shown to be largely fatalistic in the face of the Holocaust - there is little attempt to fight

back. Others collaborate with the Nazis and work for them - such as the Jewish inmate, Goldberg. However, as he stands in his uniform a Jewish woman approaches him and says, " You look like a clown.

Some Jews did take action, when they were being gathered up for transportation to the camps, some Jewish doctors carried out euthanasia to prevent unnecessary suffering, at the hands of the Nazis. Some of the films most memorable scenes focused on the selection process, prior to getting sent to the concentration camps. This process initially sorted whether they had a useful or worthless profession. Useful jobs, according to the Nazis involved manual skills - engineering, for example or metal polishing.

Teachers, doctors and lawyers were, by this standard unessential.

If your profession were ' useful' you would go to a labour camp, if your profession were unessential you would be quickly exterminated. Once in the camps a second selection process was carried out, the Jews were made to strip naked and run around, so that Nazi doctors could assess how fit they were. Any Jews decided too old, unfit or unwell were killed. In one scene we see young women pricking their fingers and rubbing their blood on their cheeks, in an attempt to look healthy. Transportation to the concentration camps was central to the whole process; the Jews were transported to death camps by train.

They were herded into cattle cars with no food or water and no room to sit down. They were forced to travel for days in these conditions, which left them weak, disorientated and unable to resist the horrors, which awaited them. Some of the films most terrifying moments focus on the death camp at

Auschwitz, when Schindler's Jews reached Auschwitz the sexes were separated, stripped, their heads shaven and are herded into gas chambers disguised as shower rooms, some were even given soap and towels.

As they descended into the gas chambers there was a rain of human ash falling on them. Schindler's Jews survived because they had been sent there wrongly and were rescued. Most other Jews were not so fortunate. A large number of primary and secondary sources can be used to confirm the accuracy of Spielberg's film. The scenes which depict how the Jews are dehumanised - being called "units" and "a virus" are supported as accurate in an article by Goebbels which the Nazi leader states; The fact that the Jew still lives among us, no proof that he is one of us, no more than the fleas domestic resilience makes him a domestic pet. " Similarly there exists a contemporary photograph, which confirms that the taunting of Orthodox Jews by the Nazi soldiers took place, an image directly copied in the film.

The brutal treatment of Jewish children shown in the film can also be confirmed as accurate by other sources, one survivor quotes, " Tiniest infants were brutally murdered, many wrenched from their mothers arms. This source confirms scenes from the film which Jewish children are taken from their mothers. A British reporter, Richard Dimbleby said, " Its horrible. Human beings have no right to do this to each other. " Another primary source - " Rules from a concentration camp" - confirms the regime of fear and death, which existed in the camps: "... will be accused of accused of sabotage and executed. " A reference in another source to a " Jewish Working Party" supports the suggestion that in the film some Jews, like Goldberg did collaborate.

The purpose of the camps was to force the Jews to work prior to extermination is confirmed by a source, which states that it was, "destruction by work." However, some sources do contradict the film. For example, one scene in Spielberg's film shows Nazis stealing the Jews belongings - but Himmler stated at the time that, "we have no right to enrich ourselves." However, most other sources confirm the accuracy of Spielberg's depiction. Overall, 'Schindler's List' would appear to be an accurate depiction of the Holocaust.

Spielberg is of course, careful not to be too explicit in his portrayal of the terrible treatment of the Jews; for example, he does not show the Jews actually getting killed in the gas chambers. However he avoids such horrors because he wishes the film to be watched by as many people as possible, to ensure they learn about what happened. For that reason he does not give a full portrayal, but we see enough of the extermination process - the gas chambers, the burning chimneystacks and the piles of corpses - to use our imagination, to picture what is happening.

In addition, the film is about Schindler's Jews who survived the Holocaust. Historically it is accurate; of course it does not show the full horror of the Holocaust for the majority of the Jews. Having seen Belsen myself however, I can understand why he did not do so. It would have been too shocking. Nevertheless Spielberg portrays enough of the Holocaust to let the present know what happened in the past and to let us learn from it. It is not a complete picture but is an accurate and true one - and that is what Spielberg set out to create.