

0. GOEBBELS and PROPAGANDA FILMS - Story Preface

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While he was still Chancellor, Hitler and Goebbels (who would become Minister of Propaganda) visit the Babelsberg Studios where "Road without Obstacles" was produced. Propaganda films played an important role in Nazi methodology. The photo, taken on 4 January 1935, is maintained by the German Federal Archives. It is identified as "Bild 183-1990-1002-500."

Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda for the Third Reich, had a pressing job to do. The war was going badly for his country, but it was his job to make sure that no one lost heart. After all, it was Goebbels who said:

The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never escape from it. (Goebbels, quoted by David Welch in *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945*, at page 198.)

With a PhD from Heidelberg University, the Nazi's chief propagandist had a powerful position. He even controlled who could make movies (and what those films would depict). Moreover, he was an orator who knew how to move a huge crowd and keep them on their feet.

After Germany's devastating loss at Stalingrad, Goebbels delivered his most famous speech on the 18th of February, 1943. Speaking in Berlin, he talked of "total war" and asked his listeners whether they were prepared to pay the price of victory. Thunderously responding, the crowd gave Goebbels the answer he wanted to hear.

Not everyone may have understood the lengths to which Goebbels would go to achieve his objectives. Even so, he made them clear when he explained the use of propaganda:

Propaganda is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. If the means achieves the end then the means is good. (From "Speech to the Press on the Establishment of a Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda," March 15, 1933.)

In other words, the films which were released in Germany, during Goebbel's time in power, were designed to convey a message.

One of the most infamous messages was contained in "The Eternal Jew." Its racist content was taken to heart, and acted upon, by Hans Landa - "The Jew Hunter" - portrayed by Christoph Waltz in "Inglourious Basterds."

Watching "The Eternal Jew" today, one cannot imagine how such a hateful piece of work could have ever been created. Likening an entire people to parasites and rodents, this antisemitic film was intended to make observers despise the movie's subjects. It brings to mind another of Goebbels' observations:

...when one lies, one should lie big... (See Goebbels' January 12, 1941 article entitled "Churchill's Lie Factory.")

On the other hand, a film like "Triumph of the Will" was intended to make its observers passionately believe in Hitler. Who else but the Nazi leader, it seems to ask, could restore Germany's world standing?

In one of his last essays, written while the Soviet Army was blowing up the German countryside, the Propaganda Minister urged his fellow citizens to keep fighting:

In 1918, we gave up at the last minute. That will not happen in 1945. We all have to see to that. This is the foundation of our ultimate victory.

It may sound improbable today, but it is nonetheless so: Final victory will be ours. It will come through tears and blood, but it will justify all the sacrifices we have made. (See "Widerstand um jeden Preis," *Das Reich*, 22 April 1945, pp. 1-2.)

His words, likely read by very few people at that stage of the war, rang hollow even in his own home. Two weeks after he wrote his essay, Goebbels had his six children brought into Hitler's bunker where they were poisoned. After the children died, he and his wife (Magda) committed suicide.

Although he'd given specific orders to burn his and Magda's bodies, there wasn't enough petrol in the bunker to do the job. His charred remains were identifiable, and the bodies of his entire family were removed by the Red Army when Berlin fell.

In the end, Goebbels' propaganda - whether speeches, posters, stories or films with beautiful women (like Zarah Leander) - had not been enough to help Hitler win the war.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/GOEBBELS-and-PROPAGANDA-FILMS-Inglourious-Basterds)

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Questions 2 Ponder

If the “Means Achieves the End,” Is the Means Always Good?

During the era of Germany's Third Reich, led by Hitler, the German people were flooded with propaganda. They were led by individuals who believed that the “means justifies the end,” even if the government's “means” included inhumane treatment of others.

Trying to convince Germans that the Nazi position was the right position, Joseph Goebbels - the Reich's “Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda” - said: “The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never escape from it.”

If we take Goebbels' position on “means” and “end” to be his view of the world, what does that tell us about what he was willing to do in order to achieve his objectives?

Assuming that he spoke for the government, what does Goebbels' position on propaganda tell us about the Nazi government? Were the Third-Reich atrocities predictable? Why, or why not?

What does “Public Enlightenment” mean, to you, in the context of a ruthless government?

When Is “Too Much” Too Much?

Thinking it was his job to lie to the German people about how the war was going, Goebbels also said: “In 1918, we gave up at the last minute. That will not happen in 1945. We all have to see to that. This is the foundation of our ultimate victory. It may sound improbable today, but it is nonetheless so: Final victory will be ours. It will come through tears and blood, but it will justify all the sacrifices we have made.”

Do citizens expect their government officials to be truthful? Why, or why not?

Should citizens expect their government officials to be untruthful? Why, or why not?

Do Goebbels' statements about the use of propaganda justify what amounted to deliberate lies? Why, or why not?

If government officials tell too many lies, what can citizens do if the next election is far off?

Are people able to “see through” propaganda messages today - or - are 21st-century individuals as gullible as people who believed Goebbels' propaganda during WWII?

How can a person who reads or hears propaganda determine what is true and what is not true?

Is it fair to conclude that Goebbels' endless stream of inaccurate information, turned into government propaganda intended to deceive the German people, was “too much?” Explain your answer.

Can you think of a time in your life when “too much” was, in fact, “too much?” What were those circumstances, and what did you do about it?

Media Stream



Joseph Goebbels - Propaganda Minister

Photo online, courtesy ADN-ZB/Archiv - Bild (picture) 183-1989-0821-502

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The Eternal Jew - Racist Nazi Film

Image of Nazi propaganda film, online courtesy [Deutsches Historisches Museum](http://www.deutsches-historisches-museum.de), Berlin.

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Joseph and Magda Goebbels - With Their Children

Photo online, courtesy [Deutsches Bundesarchiv](http://www.deutsches-bundesarchiv.de) (German Federal Archive), Bild (picture) 146-1978-086-03.

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Magda Goebbels - Portrait, 1933

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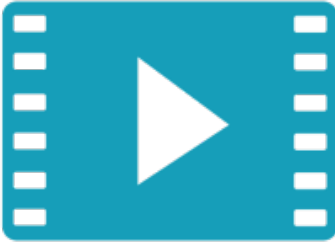
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Joseph Goebbels Speech - "Total War"

Video clip online, courtesy Archive.org

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