

January 2018

Film Review: Alfred Hitchcock—The Films That Reflected American Society from 1940–1944

Amy Stewart
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stewart, Amy (2018) "Film Review: Alfred Hitchcock—The Films That Reflected American Society from 1940–1944," *History in the Making*: Vol. 11 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol11/iss1/18>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Reviews

Film Review: Alfred Hitchcock—The Films That Reflected American Society from 1940–1944

By Amy Stewart

Among the great film directors of the twentieth-century, few mastered the art of weaving their own fears, and those of the American public into their motion pictures as well as British-American director, Alfred Hitchcock. His psychological thrillers became a popular source of entertainment in American society during World War II.¹ In one of his countless interviews throughout his career, Hitchcock commented that “a glimpse into the world proves that horror is nothing other than reality.”² Hitchcock drew inspiration from the world around him, enabling him to create a profound new genre of horror films. He produced dozens of works that provided a clear picture of American society during times of intense global conflict.

Alfred Hitchcock is known in Hollywood, and throughout the entire entertainment industry, as one of film’s greatest directors. He is credited with directing over fifty films throughout his nearly six-decade career. Born in 1899, Hitchcock’s films often reflected familiar scenes and experiences from his childhood, which, much like the stories he told on screen, were a constant

¹ During the twentieth-century, film rapidly became the most influential media format in America, because of its practically unique capability to simultaneously reach all classes of society. See Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

² Alfred Hitchcock, qtd. by Charlie Rose, interview by Charlie Rose, “Conversation with Guillermo del Toro,” *Technology Wire*, December 3, 2013; See also, Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 1: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

interplay of darkness and light.³ His family owned a greengrocer in the growing town of Leytonstone, located six miles from London, and his family life has been described by many scholars as having been mostly warm and cheerful. He did however recount experiencing several moments of fear and anxiety during his upbringing, which influenced how he presented his characters and themes within his films.⁴ He once stated “the only way to get rid of my fears is to make films about them.”⁵ He had a distinct captivation with horror, and the characters in his films were often just ordinary people inserted into bizarre situations filled with suspense, fear, and suspicion.⁶

Hitchcock’s film experience began in Britain in the early 1920s, when he started as an art director on British silent films. His directorial debut came in 1922, with the release of *The Pleasure Garden*, and in 1929, he released his first sound film, *Blackmail*. However, it was his first thriller film, *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, released in 1927 that catapulted him into the limelight. The success of *The Lodger*, earned Hitchcock a reputation as a masterful director of psychological thrillers, and later earned him the title of the “Master of Suspense.” In 1939, Hitchcock moved from England to Hollywood, and quickly became one of the leading film directors in the United States. The United States offered a much larger market for Hitchcock’s films. In America during the early 1940s, an average of 90 million theater tickets were sold every week. The next four decades of Hitchcock’s career in America would include dozens of films, several of which are regarded by scholars and filmmakers today as some of the greatest movies ever made.⁷ In the 1940s, when the world was gripped by the chaos and violence of World War II, Hitchcock released a number of films that included political and social themes reflective of the period.

³ Patrick McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), 11.

⁴ Gene Adair, *Alfred Hitchcock: Filming Our Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13-14.

⁵ Casey McKittrick, *Hitchcock’s Appetites: The Corpulent Plots of Desire and Dread* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 128.

⁶ McGilligan, *A Life in Darkness and Light*, 13.

⁷ Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

This paper will specifically examine how three of Alfred Hitchcock's wartime films, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and *Lifeboat* (1944) mirror the growing anxiety of Americans due to the rise of the Nazi regime and provide insight into American society during World War II. Hitchcock used suspense, unique characters, settings, and sound in his films to reflect the fear and anxiety present within society during this troubled chapter of American history, while also reflecting the somewhat fearful, yet motivated character that permeated the nation during World War II.

The war was a global catastrophe, causing more than 60 million deaths worldwide, some 400,000 of which were Americans, from 1939–1945.⁸ Its profound impact transformed the lives of American soldiers and civilians alike. In the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for Americans to mobilize together and contribute to the war effort.⁹ Food and other commodities were rationed as the war took precedence over everyday desires. Women were given jobs in factories to help surge production of wartime materials, increasing their employment in factory jobs to 32 percent by 1944.¹⁰ In addition to women, by 1945 African Americans held 8 percent of all wartime jobs.¹¹ People flocked from rural areas to industrial urban centers, seeking to find jobs in wartime industry, causing the unemployment rate to decrease from 10 percent in 1940 to 1.3 percent by 1944.¹²

News of the conflict across the globe captured the attention of the majority of Americans throughout the war.¹³ Radio broadcasts kept people informed on the events overseas, and popular entertainment, especially films, served to demonize America's enemies. Watching such films allowed Americans, of all social classes, to escape their concerns about World War II.

⁸ Adeline G. Levine and Murray Levine, "WWII and the Home Front: The Intersection of History and Biography," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81, no. 4 (2011): 433.

⁹ Paul Kenneth O'Brien and Lynn H. Parsons, *The Home Front War: World War II and American Society* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 3-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5-9.

This fact was not lost on Hitchcock, who designed his films with this phenomenon in mind and once remarked “reality is something that none of us can stand, at any time.”¹⁴ His goal was to immerse his audience in his stories and have them channel their inner anxiety by having them worry about the characters on screen rather than themselves. To explore this phenomenon in greater detail, this paper will begin with an analysis of Hitchcock’s 1940 film *Foreign Correspondent*.

1940—*Foreign Correspondent*

After his move to Hollywood in 1939 and the production of his first American film *Rebecca* in 1940, Hitchcock released his second American film that same year, titled *Foreign Correspondent*, a fictional spy thriller centered on an American reporter trying to expose enemy spies in Britain prior to World War II. While the film is set before World War II begins, it is a clear reflection of the anxiety present within the United States as it anticipated the eruption of a global conflict.

In the film, set in 1939, an editor for the *New York Globe* seeks answers regarding the impending war in Europe, as he has a growing concern about the expanding influence of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. A man by the name of Huntley Haverstock is chosen as a foreign correspondent and is sent to London to interview the leader of the Universal Peace Party, while also covertly gathering information on a secret treaty between countries. As Haverstock digs deeper for information, he begins to uncover an underground kidnapping conspiracy, and soon finds himself the target of several international spies.

By the end of the film, England and France have declared war on Germany. Haverstock, on a plane back to America, crashes into the ocean after being shot down by a German destroyer. He returns to London and desperately urges America on live radio broadcast to fortify itself. As he describes the horrific bombing surrounding him in London, the American National Anthem playing in the background, Haverstock powerfully declares

¹⁴ Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in Ken Mogg, “Hitchcock Made Only One Horror Film: Matters of Time, Space, Causality, and the Schopenhauerian Will,” ed. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 84.

All that noise you hear isn't static—it's death, coming to London. Yes, they're coming here now. You can hear the bombs falling on the streets and the homes. Don't tune me out, hang on a while—this is a big story, and you're part of it. It's too late to do anything here now except stand in the dark and let them come...as if the lights were all out everywhere, except in America. Keep those lights burning, cover them with steel, ring them with guns, build a canopy of battleships and bombing planes around them. Hello, America, hang on to your lights: they're the only lights left in the world!¹⁵

This final quote of the film serves as a plea to America to prepare to defend itself as the Second World War breaks out in Europe. As Europe descended into conflict Hitchcock, originally from Great Britain, was disheartened that he could not be of aid in the war effort overseas.¹⁶ Across the Atlantic, the United States had yet to be directly affected by the heavy bombing and gruesome battles that riddled the European countryside and cities.

It was not until the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that America formally joined the struggle. While he was dismayed that he could not physically join the fight and that he was so far removed from the chaos riddling his country, Hitchcock's contribution to the war and to Britain came in the form of filmmaking. His narrative works during the 1940s, like *Foreign Correspondent*, boasted political and social themes that rattled the norms of the film industry. However, Hitchcock's mastery did not stop with his fictional theatrical thrillers; he worked on several war films that documented the horrors of the German army and concentration camps. In 1945, he advised on the making of *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, a film by British producer Sidney Bernstein. The film documented the liberation of German concentration camps through the eyes of allied camera operators, both soldiers and reporters. Hitchcock's suggestions of extended shots, camera panning and utilizing impactful imagery increased the film's credibility and reduced the chance the film

¹⁵ *Foreign Correspondent*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Beverly Hills: United Artists, 1940).

¹⁶ Paul Duncan, *Alfred Hitchcock: Architect of Anxiety, 1899-1980* (Taschen, 2011), 90.

would be considered fake.¹⁷ Hitchcock's techniques that he suggested for *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* were ones that he used in his fictional stories as well. His direction, whether real or fictional, engineered motion pictures that had profound and lasting effects on audiences that viewed them. Despite not being able to fight in the war, Hitchcock did all he could to contribute to public awareness of the state of the world during World War II.

In *Foreign Correspondent*, one of his most prominent politically themed films, Hitchcock uses suspense, characters, and sound to reflect American society directly prior to, and at the start of, World War II. There are several scenes in the film where Haverstock's life is at risk. One such scene takes place in London atop the Westminster Cathedral tower, where a bodyguard, really a disguised assassin, is assigned to kill Haverstock by pushing him off the edge. The audience is aware of the bodyguard's violent intention, as he takes several nervous glances around him to make sure no one will witness his murder attempt, and thus viewers slowly build up fear as to what is about to happen. Hitchcock is able to mirror the anxiety of society during this scenario. There were growing reports of an impending war in Europe, and Americans feared what their role, as both individuals and a nation as a whole, would be. Dread mounted within American minds as chaos abroad loomed closer. While the film does not take place on American soil, it centers on an American correspondent sent to Europe. The real-life fear of Americans is on full display from the very beginning of the film, as the newspaper editor at the *New York Globe* expresses his growing concerns about the conspiracies and rumors of a great war that is about to erupt abroad.

This initial concern by the character drives the rest of the film, and by the end, war does indeed break out. Hitchcock uses Haverstock's final speech to mirror his own political desires; America should prepare itself for war and its people should not be afraid, but instead build up their defenses and commit to keeping their light burning. Hitchcock inserts the United States' National Anthem in this dramatic final act, a maneuver clearly intended to motivate American viewers to take action in defending their country from the Homefront. *Foreign Correspondent* incorporates a fictional story into a nonfictional setting in a way that makes the

¹⁷ *Night Will Fall*, directed by Andre Singer (2014).

viewer feel as if the war was not their reality. Instead, the war is affecting the characters within the story, thus creating distance from reality and allowing them a brief escape. At the end of the film, however, they are brutally reminded that what transpired on screen was in fact the reality they had to face, and, as if Hitchcock was speaking into the microphone instead of Haverstock, they are told to make sure they do something about it. After the release of *Foreign Correspondent*, Hitchcock continued to direct and release films, even as the war raged on across the globe.

1943—*Shadow of a Doubt*

In 1943, Hitchcock released one of his first film noirs, *Shadow of a Doubt*. Film noir was a popular genre of crime-centered cinema in the early 1940s. It was born out of the German Expressionist movement in the 1920s as a response to social anxiety during the post-World War I period. Following the Nazi takeover of Germany in 1933, many German filmmakers fled to the United States and quickly found work in Hollywood. In the early 1920s, when he was just starting out in the film industry, Hitchcock spent some time working at a film studio in Berlin. There he adopted many elements of cinematic Expressionism, including different lighting techniques and camera blocking methods that served to heighten suspense in his crime thrillers. Hitchcock would continue to employ Expressionist techniques throughout his films, all the way to his 1960s cult classic, *Psycho*.¹⁸

Shadow of a Doubt was a psychological crime thriller set in sleepy Santa Rosa, California, and centers on Charlie Newton, or “Young Charlie,” and Charlie Oakley, her uncle and namesake. Young Charlie idolizes her uncle, almost to the point of a romantic infatuation, until she begins to suspect, and eventually learns, that he is a serial killer known as the “Merry Widow Murderer.” After Uncle Charlie admits his crimes to Young Charlie, she is forced to keep his secrets with the promise that he will leave town and never return. Meanwhile, the detectives who initially targeted Uncle Charlie pursue another suspect in the murder cases, and when that suspect is killed in the ensuing chase, Uncle Charlie is exonerated. However, Young Charlie knows all of his secrets and threatens to kill him if he stays in Santa Rosa. He then tries to murder Young

¹⁸ Adair, *Filming Our Fears*. 25-27.

Charlie twice, first by suffocating her from exhaust fumes from his car in the garage, then by trying to push her off a fast-moving train. Both of his attempts fail, and in the end, he falls to his death from the train after Young Charlie pushes him off during their struggle. At his funeral in the final scene of the film, Young Charlie recalls the terrible things Uncle Charlie said about the world, while the town, unbeknownst that he was a murderer, can be heard honoring his brave, generous, and kind character in the background.¹⁹

Hitchcock's most persistent theme throughout most of his films, and one that is glaringly present in *Shadow of a Doubt*, is the fact that something dark and cynical is hidden under seemingly normal and happy façades; that there are enemies lurking in the shadows of places that would never expect to see conflict or devastation.²⁰ His setting for the film is Santa Rosa, California, a picturesque, cookie-cutter American town. However, after discovering Uncle Charlie is a brutal serial killer, Young Charlie's view of the picture-perfect image of American society is shattered.

Charlie states, in the closing scene of the film, that her Uncle Charlie "hated the whole world...he said people like us had no idea what the world was really like."²¹ In response, Jack, one of the detectives who was investigating Charlie's crimes, states that "sometimes the world needs a lot of watching" and that "it seems to go crazy every now and then."²² This last scene, much like the last scene of *Foreign Correspondent*, alludes to the chaos happening overseas in Europe. Young Charlie's statement depicts the naivety of the American people to the reality of being in the midst of violent conflict on the home front. There was no war being fought on American soil, and thus the average American did not understand how the war could really affect not only an individual, but also an entire country. There were, however, growing changes within American society at this time.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the everyday family life changed drastically when men enlisted to go fight. American society was more broken than before the war, and Young Charlie is

¹⁹ *Shadow of a Doubt*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1943.

²⁰ Steffen Hantke, "Hitchcock at War: Shadow of a Doubt, Wartime Propaganda, and the Director as Star," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 44, no. 3 (2016): 162.

²¹ *Shadow of a Doubt*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

²² *Ibid.*

exposed to this larger, less sheltered world once she discovers the reality behind her uncle's intentions. Young Charlie is a character dead set on unveiling the truth, and is not given an opportunity to be heard as equally as her Uncle. The majority of her small town prefers to be ignorant to the malevolent man, and more broadly, to the darkness of the world as a whole. Hitchcock highlights the fact that women were often split between supporting the men they loved who were expressing their freedom and independence by fighting abroad, and maintaining their values and channeling their desires into their homes.²³ Young Charlie is an example of a woman who is transformed by outside influences, whether it be the war or, in her case, her psychotic uncle. She begins the film as an innocent, young American girl, who is eventually forced by a man she thought she knew to keep a dark secret, and thus she is forever changed.²⁴ Her innocence is gone by the end of the film, instead replaced by a deeper understanding of society and its inevitable faults.

Shadow of a Doubt is an excellent example of how Hitchcock portrayed America during World War II in his early 1940s films. While most films in this period depicted American society with hopefulness, stating that America was a shining beacon in a world consumed by conflict, Hitchcock shattered this, overly cheerful ideal through his suspenseful plot line. His villain is the average good-natured family man that everyone in town adores, eventually exposed as a ruthless murderer, who killed because he believed it was his duty, a mindset that was undoubtedly ingrained into the minds of the soldiers who fought overseas for their countries.²⁵ Every soldier who fought in the war surely experienced a sense of duty to their own country, one that convinced them that they had to kill in order to protect their homes, and that there was no other way around the issue.

Hitchcock cast an apparently average person as an unsuspected villain in order to reveal that no town, no matter how

²³ Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, *The War in American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 89-90.

²⁴ David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53.

²⁵ Alva Johnston, "300-Pound Prophet Comes to Hollywood" *Saturday Evening Post*, May 22, 1943, [https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Saturday_Evening_Post_\(22/May/1943\)_-_300-Pound_Prophet_Comes_to_Hollywood](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Saturday_Evening_Post_(22/May/1943)_-_300-Pound_Prophet_Comes_to_Hollywood).

small and boring, was safe from the darkness of the world. Anyone, anywhere was subject to unexpected cruelty, not just those countries and people living in the midst of a battlefield. Just as in *Foreign Correspondent*, Hitchcock calls on the American people to be ready to defend themselves at the most unexpected of times; they had to make sure that they were left standing victorious and stronger than ever at the end of the war. No one knew when, or if, the war would find its way to American soil, and that underlying narrative of fear present in the film was intended to motivate its viewers to contribute to the war effort and defend the freedom and safety of the United States. Hitchcock's use of sound in *Shadow of a Doubt* is particularly remarkable as well, as it reflects both a happy, idealistic American town, and the dark secrets it has yet to discover. The background music during some of the movie's pivotal scenes seeks to heighten the viewer's anxiety. It begins normally and then increases in tempo as information continues to be revealed to the audience. Additionally, he overlays contradictory dialogue during the final scene of the film, when Young Charlie describes Uncle Charlie's transgressions and hate towards the world, all the while the community praises his generous character in the background at his funeral.

Throughout *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock is able to portray the reality of American society, especially in a world that was being terrorized by Nazis and their allies. Although the film takes place in 1941, before the attacks on Pearl Harbor and America's entrance into the war, Hitchcock seeks to demonstrate that Americans are not beyond the reach of the darkness of humankind. This film is a key source in understanding 1940s American society through Hitchcock's films and the techniques he utilized within them to heighten their emotional impact on viewers and thus reinforce their commitment to the war effort.

1944—*Lifeboat*

In 1944, Hitchcock released *Lifeboat*, a survival drama that depicts the ordeal of several passengers stranded in a lifeboat in the Atlantic Ocean after their ship is sunk by a German U-boat at the height of World War II. The characters vary in nationality, religion, and gender; consequently, tensions and frustrations between survivors take center stage in the film. In the beginning of the film, a ship holding British and American civilians, soldiers,

and merchants, engages in combat with a German U-boat. The two vessels attack, and subsequently sink each other. The British and American survivors board a lifeboat and pull a German sailor from the sunken U-boat to safety, much to the disgust of several passengers. The sailor is eventually revealed to be the captain of the U-boat that sank them.

Throughout the film, the characters must manage their resources and learn to cooperate in order to survive their ordeal, however they quickly grow frustrated, delirious, and desperate after being afloat for an extended period. Along the way, several characters die, and the German sailor is eventually exposed as to having hidden a flask filled with fresh water from the other passengers, and is brutally beaten and thrown overboard by those on the lifeboat. As the passengers are finally about to be rescued by being taken aboard a German supply ship, it is sunk by an approaching allied vessel. Soon thereafter they rescue another German sailor from the wreckage and question what they should do to him while they wait for their rescue.

Lifeboat is a unique film, in that it is told through the eyes of various complex characters of different nationalities. Hitchcock casts his characters as archetypes within this film. Each character is recognized by what they represent, whether it be a country or a political alignment, meaning that they are known as “the Nazi” or “the Communist” rather than by name.²⁶ Each has a different background, and thus they are very telling of how Hitchcock viewed each country, the German representation being the most obvious. This technique served to underscore global political turbulence without losing focus on the fictional story being played out on screen. Hitchcock employed this practice to great effect in his commercial thriller films during the 1940s, and during his collaboration with the British Ministry of Information in 1944, which saw the creation of two short films intended for propaganda use in France to boost civilian morale.²⁷ While *Lifeboat* was not strictly a propaganda film, it certainly included allusions to the political tensions that were ripping apart the globe. According to Hitchcock, the purpose of *Lifeboat* was to tell “the democracies to

²⁶ Justin J. Gustainis and Deborah Jay DeSilva, “Archetypes as Propaganda in Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Lost’ World War II Films,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

put their differences aside temporarily and to gather their forces to concentrate on the common enemy.”²⁸

This film is a cinematic portrayal of the Allied forces’ need to forget their differences and unite to defeat the enemy. One character states, “Now, now, now, we’re all sort of fellow travelers in a mighty small boat, in a mighty big ocean. And the more we quarrel, criticize and misunderstand each other, the bigger the ocean gets and the smaller the boat.”²⁹ This alludes to the fact that the war will come to no resolution if it continues as it has. However, the picture drew intense criticism because of Hitchcock’s depiction of the German captain. In a critical review, Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* wrote that the film elevated the Nazi “superman” and was a failed attempt to represent American civilians and democracy during World War II.³⁰ Crowther’s issue lies with the humanization of the Nazi man and his treatment as a normal person by the other characters. In his mind, Americans were far superior to Nazis and their horrific ideals.

Hitchcock is quick to depict the German as being smarter and more capable of leadership than any other character on the boat. However, the character ultimately betrays everyone’s trust by hiding much needed fresh water from them and drowning one of the characters in the night, to which the rest of the passengers react violently. In Crowther’s mind, Americans would never be so forgiving to a man who they knew belonged to a violent cult with malicious intent, and is disappointed that it took him breaking their trust to react appropriately. This specific portrayal of Germans in the latter part of the film, contrary to the controversial beginning of the story, is reflective of how Americans, and the world, viewed Germany at the time. Even before war broke out, the Nazi regime was a growing cause of concern and fear across the globe. Nazi Germany was detested because of the atrocities it committed and for its constant aggression; it repeatedly violated the neutrality of surrounding nations and abrogated international treaties. Hitchcock was able to portray this distrust in the latter part of the film, despite

²⁸ Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 113.

²⁹ *Lifeboat*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1944.

³⁰ Bosley Crowther, “Adrift in Lifeboat: The New Hitchcock-Steinbeck Drama Represents Democracy at Sea,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1944,

critics at the time worrying about the picture's appeal to Nazism through its treatment of the German character early on in the story.

Lifeboat was one of Hitchcock's most controversial, albeit successful, politically centered films. It is a purposeful film that highlights the allied animosity towards the Germans during World War II, and introduces the question of who people truly are when they lose everything they value.³¹ Propaganda films are an integral part of the film industry during any conflict, especially World War II. After the United States was plunged into the war following the attack on Pearl Harbor, short propaganda films shown before each motion picture served to briefly reignite people's desire to support the allied effort to win the war in Europe. During this same period, narrative films like those of Alfred Hitchcock served as another important source of social and political messages, even if they were not as blatantly obvious as propaganda documentaries.³² *Lifeboat* was primarily intended as a source of entertainment for American cinema-goers; however, due to Hitchcock's use of character archetypes throughout the film, it also served as a meaningful piece of propaganda that underscored the unified willpower to survive amongst the allied nations, whilst simultaneously reminding viewers of the threat of Nazi Germany. The film simultaneously gave Americans hope of a united front, without letting them forget their fear of the enemy.

Conclusion

During times of fear and anxiety throughout the 1940s, films were a place that people could forget about the terrors of reality and be immersed into the lives of characters whose situations were worse off than their own, something that Alfred Hitchcock easily mastered. He used suspense, settings, politically modeled characters, and sound to elevate his productions in ways that director had previously done. His films left a lasting impact on the psychological horror genre of film, but are also a key aspect of understanding the history of American society in the 1940s. Through the examples shown throughout this paper's analysis, it is clear that the selected works of Hitchcock provide a commentary on society during World War II.

³¹ Duncan, *Architect of Anxiety*, 104.

³² Gustainis and DeSilva, "Archetypes as Propaganda," 80.

His political and social themes were not always blatantly obvious to the average viewer, but the underlying messages were still evident through the techniques he used in almost all of his American films. Hitchcock took real life situations and was able to craft from them incredibly dynamic, fictional stories that granted his audiences a brief, albeit much needed, relief from the terrors that plagued them in reality. He perfected the art of translating the fears of his audiences onto the silver screen, and thus rightfully earned his reputation as a master of horror and suspense. Today, his films stand as a lasting contribution and resource to the study of American society during World War II.

Bibliography

- Adair, Gene. *Alfred Hitchcock: Filming Our Fears*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Crowther, Bosley. "Adrift in Lifeboat: The New Hitchcock-Steinbeck Drama Represents Democracy at Sea." *New York Times*. January 23, 1944.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1944/01/23/archives/adrift-in-lifeboat-the-new-hitchcocksteinbeck-drama-represents.html>
- Duncan, Paul. *Alfred Hitchcock: Architect of Anxiety, 1899-1980*. Koln: Taschen, 2011.
- Erenberg, Lewis A., Susan E. Hirsch. *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Foreign Correspondent*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Beverly Hills: United Artists, 1940.
- Gustainis, Justin J., and Deborah Jay DeSilva. "Archetypes as Propaganda in Alfred Hitchcock's 'Lost' World War II Films." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 80-87.

- Hantke, Steffen. "Hitchcock at War: Shadow of a Doubt, Wartime Propaganda, and the Director as Star." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 44, no. 3 (2016): 159-168.
- Hitchcock, Alfred. *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 1: Selected Writings and Interviews*. Edited by Sydney Gottlieb. Berkley: University of California Press, 2015.
- . *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Vol. 2: Selected Writings and Interviews*. Edited by Sydney Gottlieb. Berkley: University of California Press, 2015.
- Johnston, Alva. "300-Pound Prophet Comes to Hollywood." *Saturday Evening Post*. May 22, 1943.
[https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Saturday_Evening_Post_\(22/May/1943\)_-_300-Pound_Prophet_Comes_to_Hollywood](https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Saturday_Evening_Post_(22/May/1943)_-_300-Pound_Prophet_Comes_to_Hollywood)
- Kapsis, Robert E. *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Levine, Adeline G. and Murray Levine. "WWII and the Home Front: The Intersection of History and Biography." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 81, no. 4 (2011): 433-441.
- Lifeboat*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1944.
- McGilligan, Patrick. *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2003.
- McKittrick, Casey. *Hitchcock's Appetites: The Corpulent Plots of Desire and Dread*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Mogg, Ken. "Hitchcock Made Only One Horror Film: Matters of Time, Space, Causality, and the Schopenhauerian Will." In *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*. Edited by Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw, 84-104. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003.

O'Brien, Kenneth Paul and Lynn H. Parsons. *The Home Front War: World War II and American Society*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995.

Rose, Charlie. "Conversation with Guillermo del Toro." Interview by Charlie Rose. *Technology Wire*. December 4, 2013.

Shadow of a Doubt. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1943.

Night Will Fall. Documentary Film. Directed by Andre Singer. 2014. <https://www.netflix.com/title/80015213>.

Sklar, Robert. *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Spoto, Donald. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 1983.

Sterritt, David. *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Truffaut, Francois. *Hitchcock*. Translated by Helen G. Scott. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966.

Author Bio

Amy Stewart graduated from California State University San Bernardino in 2017. She earned her bachelor's degree in history with a concentration in European studies. She has always loved history and, in the summer of 2014, she was given the opportunity to volunteer on an archaeological dig site in Israel, which furthered her passion for the ancient and medieval periods. Her fascination with history continues to grow from the ability to see and experience the places and cultures that she learned and read about through her studies. She is currently working full time and hopes to continue to find the time to travel, especially to the places in Europe that she learned about while pursuing her degree at CSUSB.

History in the Making

