

## *Americans and the Holocaust* Film Guide

This list provides examples of films for libraries hosting the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition that are available and reflect the themes of the exhibition. It is not meant to be comprehensive. Descriptions are copied from publicity and distribution sources.

### Documentaries

***50 Children: The Rescue Mission of Mr. and Mrs. Kraus*. Directed by Steven Pressman, 2013. (62 minutes)**

In the spring of 1939, Philadelphia couple Gilbert and Eleanor Kraus embarked on a risky and unlikely mission. Traveling into the heart of Nazi Germany, they rescued 50 Jewish children from Vienna and brought them to the United States.

**Book connection:** *50 Children: One Ordinary America Couple's Extraordinary Rescue Mission into the Heart of Nazi Germany* by Steven Pressman (Harper, 2014)

***Betrayed: Surviving an American Concentration Camp*. Directed by Rory Banyard, 2022. (56 minutes)**

Discover the story of a group of Japanese Americans and their incarceration by the U.S. government during World War II. Through the compelling voices of survivors of Minidoka, a concentration camp in the Idaho desert, *Betrayed* tells a universal story about unjust internment and the loss of civil rights.

***From Swastika to Jim Crow*. Directed by Lori Cheatle, Steven Fischler, Joel Sucher, Martin Toub, 2000. (60 minutes)**

Before and during World War II, Jewish scholars who escaped Nazi Germany and immigrated to the U.S. were confronted with antisemitism at major universities and a public distrust of foreigners. A surprising number secured teaching positions at historically African American colleges in the South. In many cases they formed lasting relationships with their students and had an important impact on the communities in which they lived. This is a story of two cultures, each sharing a burden of oppression, brought together by the tragic circumstances of war.

***Nazi Town, USA*. Directed by Peter Yost, 2024. (54 minutes)**

The story of the German American Bund, a pro-Nazi group active across the US in the 1930's.

***Olympic Pride, American Prejudice*. Directed by Deborah Riley Draper, 2016. (82 minutes)**

In 1936, 18 African American athletes dubbed the "black auxiliary" by Hitler defied Nazi Aryan supremacy and Jim Crow racism to win hearts and medals at the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin. The world remembers Jesse Owens. But, *Olympic Pride American Prejudice* shows how all 18 are a seminal precursor to the modern Civil Rights Movement.

**Book connection:** *Olympic Pride, American Prejudice* by Deborah Riley Draper, Blair Underwood, and Travis Thrasher (Atria Books, 2020)

***Prelude to War* from the *Why We Fight* series. Directed by Frank Capra, 1942. (52 minutes)**

*Prelude to War* is the first film of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* film series commissioned by the Office of War Information (OWI) and General George C. Marshall. It was made to educate American troops of the necessity of combating the Axis powers during World War II based on the idea that those in the service would fight more willingly and ably if they knew the background and the reason for their participation in the war. The film was later released to the general American public as a rallying cry for support of the war.

***Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War*. Directed by Artemis Joukowsky and Ken Burns, 2013. (90 minutes)**

Waitstill Sharp, a Unitarian minister, and Martha Sharp, a trained social worker, in February 1939, boldly commit to a life-threatening mission in Europe to assist refugees.

***The U.S. and the Holocaust*. Directed by Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein. Florentine Films, 2022. (6 ½ hours; 45-minute clip reel available)**

*The U.S. and the Holocaust* is a three-part, six hour series that examines America's response to one of the greatest humanitarian crises of the twentieth century. Americans consider themselves a "nation of immigrants," but as the catastrophe of the Holocaust unfolded in Europe, the United States proved unwilling to open its doors to more than a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of desperate people seeking refuge. Through riveting firsthand testimony of witnesses and survivors who as children endured persecution, violence and flight as their families tried to escape Hitler, this series delves deeply into the tragic human consequences of public indifference, bureaucratic red tape and restrictive quota laws in America. Did the nation fail to live up to its ideals? This is a history to be reckoned with.

## Feature Films, Miniseries, and Shorts

***A Small Light*, episode 1 "Pilot." Directed by Susanna Fogel, 2022. (56 minutes)**

Follows the remarkable story of Miep Gies, a Dutch woman who risked her life to shelter Anne Frank's family from the Nazis for more than two years during World War II. [References the Frank family's attempt to immigrate to the United States.]

***Band of Brothers*, episode 9 "Why We Fight." Directed by David Frankel, 2001. (55 minutes)**

As the Allies move into Germany and the war comes closer to an end, disillusionment and anger set in for Easy Company - until they stumble onto a concentration camp abandoned by the German military.

**Book connection:** *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose (Simon and Schuster, 1993)

***The Boys in the Boat*. Directed by George Clooney, 2023. (123 minutes)**

*The Boys in the Boat* is a sports drama based on the #1 New York Times bestselling non-fiction novel written by Daniel James Brown. The film, directed by George Clooney, is about the 1936 University of Washington rowing team that competed for gold at the Summer Olympics in Berlin. This inspirational true story follows a group of underdogs at the height of the Great Depression as they are thrust into the spotlight and take on elite rivals from around the world.

**Book connection:** *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* by Daniel James Brown (Penguin, 2014)

***Casablanca*. Directed by Michael Curtiz, 1942. (102 minutes)**

A cynical American expatriate struggles to decide whether or not he should help his former lover and her fugitive husband escape French Morocco.

**Disney World War II-era shorts. Online, and released as *On the Front Lines* box set, 2004.**

On December 8, 1941, the Disney Studio was taken over by the military as part of the war effort. Making the most of the talent that hadn't shipped out yet, Walt Disney spent the next four years creating and producing training, propaganda, and educational films for the Armed Forces. Particularly *Der Fuehrer's Face*; *Education for Death*; *The Thrifty Pig*; *The Spirit of '43*.

***Foreign Correspondent*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1940. (120 minutes)**

On the eve of World War II, a young American reporter tries to expose enemy agents in London.

***The Great Dictator*. Directed by Charlie Chaplin, 1940. (125 minutes)**

Dictator Adenoid Hynkel tries to expand his empire while a poor Jewish barber tries to avoid persecution from Hynkel's regime.

***The Plot Against America*, episode 1. Directed by Minki Spiro, 2020. (58 minutes)**

Herman takes his family to look at a house in an upwardly mobile neighborhood, though Bess is wary of leaving the safety of their tight-knit Jewish community; Evelyn becomes charmed by a distinguished local clergyman.

**Book connection:** *The Plot Against America* by Phillip Roth (Houghton Mifflin, 2004)

***Race*. Directed by Stephen Hopkins, 2016. (134 minutes)**

Jesse Owens' quest to become the greatest track and field athlete in history thrusts him onto the world stage of the 1936 Olympics, where he faces off against Adolf Hitler's vision of Aryan supremacy.

## Films for Students

These films were created for younger audiences. Suggested grade levels are included, although adults should preview the films to determine their appropriateness for students and classes.

**[Behind Every Name](#). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022. (5 short videos, 5-8 minutes each)**

Explore this series of animated videos based on firsthand accounts from the Museum's collection. Each video tells a personal story of a Holocaust victim, survivor, rescuer, or eyewitness using recorded testimony, diaries, memoirs, letters, and photographs. Learn about the challenges Jews faced while escaping Nazi persecution in the late 1930s and the individual Americans who tried to help. (Grades 6-12; Available online at link above; also in Spanish.)

**[The Number on Great-Grandpa's Arm](#). Directed by Amy Schatz, 2018. (18 minutes)**

Sometimes the simple question of a child creates an opportunity for the deepest of conversations. In this 18-minute HBO film, we witness this kind of conversation between a young American boy and his great-grandfather, an Auschwitz survivor, who shares his life experiences with his great-grandson and the audience. (Grades 4-8; Available online at link above.)

**[The Path to Nazi Genocide](#). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013. (37 minutes)**

This film examines the Nazis' rise and consolidation of power in Germany. Using rare footage, the film explores their ideology, propaganda, and persecution of Jews and other victims. It also outlines the path by which the Nazis and their collaborators led a state to war and to the murder of millions of people. By providing a concise overview of the Holocaust and those involved, this resource is intended to provoke reflection and discussion about the role of ordinary people, institutions, and nations between 1918 and 1945. (Grades 7-12; Available online at link above and subtitled in multiple languages.) Note: This film contains difficult subject matter and imagery. Some segments may not be appropriate for younger audiences. Learn about resources for educators using this film at the link above.