OSCAR WINNER 1943:

Best Picture

Best Director

Best Screenplay

TEACHERS' NOTES

Casablanca is a love story, a romantic thriller in the classic Hollywood style. It exists primarily to be enjoyed, in the cinema and through countless TV matinee screenings, but it also provides numerous avenues for possible study.

It is the perfect film to teach the Hollywood studio system, for instance. Or it could be used to study the development of a script, or the role of music in film, or the marketing of Hollywood stars. It could he used to illustrate the fascinating way that cinema feeds into other film genres and media:
Casablanca must be the most parodied, quoted, and mis-quoted film in cinema history, spawning a rich checklist of catchphrases and cliches still frequently pillaged by newspaper editors, advertising copywriters, and TV sit-coin merchants.

However, surely Casablanca's richest vein is its historical context. It is a perfect example of a film made in wartime conditions, telling a wartime story, and flagging wartime issues. And so this study guide **-** aimed at students of History KS4 (Fascism) and History KS3 (The Era of the Second World War) - attempts to tackle Casablanca as follows:

Firstly, it provides sources and background to explain the political situation in Europe and the USA, focusing on four of Casablanca's key characters; the Nazi Major Strasser, the Resistance hero Victor Laszlo, the Vichy police captain Renault and the American Rick Blame.

Next, the study guide focuses on Hollywood in the years before and during the war, showing how Hollywood's natural liberalism made it an ideal source of anti-Nazi propaganda once the American war began.

And finally, Casablanca is investigated for its own, very particular 'propagandist' message, showing how the call for intervention was coupled with a mild mistrust of America's allies.

Hopefully what emerges is a complex and engrossing political picture. It is just to be hoped that the complexity never spoils the simple pleasure of watching the film.

Casablanca: Certificate U. Running time 99 minutes.

MAJOR CREDITS FOR CASABLANCA

Casablanca 1942 (Warner Bros.)

Producer:	Hal B. Wallis
Director:	Michael Curtiz
Screenplay:	Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch, [Casey Robinsoni
Director of Photography:	Arthur Edeson
Editor:	Owen Marks
Music:	Max Steiner
Art Director:	Carl Jules Weyl
Cast:	Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains, Conrad Veidt, Sydney Greenstreet.
Oscars 1943:	Best Picture
	Best Director
	Best Screenplay
Oscar Nominations 1943:	Best Actor (Humphrey Bogart)
	Best Supporting Actor (Claude Rains)
	Best B/W Cinematography
	Best Editing
	Best Scoring of a Dramatic Picture

INTRODUCTION BY DEREK MALCOLM

Many filmmakers would say that there's no such thing as a movie capable of shaking the world. But some still attempt to make them. Those who succeed are rare, and the strange thing is that even the lucky ones don't appear to know they are doing it at the time. In fact, **it** sometimes takes years to realise what really is a great film or what may have looked wonderful at the time but was just a momentary flourish.

Most of the films on this particular list didn't so much shake the world as become memorable because, when you look back on them, they seem so much better than we may have thought at the time. But memories are short and the opportunity to see the full flowering of cinema history is denied to all but a few. So the list looks a little unbalanced to me, who has been luckier than most in looking further into the past and at world cinema rather than just Hollywood.

What we get here are films which were certainly important in their time, and still look good today movies that have remained in people's affections ever since they first saw them. If there aren't really enough from the first two-thirds of cinema history, no matter. It's good at least to know that some of the greatest directors in the world are represented and that their artistry, often the equivalent of any great playwright, painter, author or composer of the 20th century, continues to be appreciated. Most of these films will live longer than we do.

CASABLANCA

Like Gone With the Wind, this romantic, historically inaccurate story, virtually made up as Michael Curtiz, its director, went along, had the benefit of two luminous stars in Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, and of a production line proficiency that was at its best in 1942. What may well have looked cliched at that time, now seems the product of filmmakers totally sure of their material and of the right way to handle it. Thank goodness that Ronald Reagan, the original choice for Bogart's part, was replaced by a much better actor. Nobody can treat Casablanca totally seriously. But no-one should treat it lightly, either. It appeals openly to the emotions, and has now become as much of a cinematic icon as a work of art. Yet if' it wasn't art, its artifice was very considerable. Otherwise it would not still burn so brightly in the memories of so many people.

RESISTING THE NAZIS: LASZLO VS STRASSER

Casablanca is set in the chaos of North West Africa in late 1941. The film throws us into a confused and bewildering world, full of once-glamorous people who are now reduced to selling their every last trinket and trading on the black market. It' they are lucky, they will raise enough to buy a seat on the plane to Lisbon, and from there travel onwards to the 'free world', America. If they are unlucky, they must wait endlessly in Casablanca. But as the film's opening narration makes clear, even stuck in Casablanca they are the fortunate ones'. Because the alternative is worse: to return to their homes in imprisoned' Europe.

To understand the European situation in 1941 **-** to understand why Europe was imprisoned **-** it is useful to focus on two of Casablanca's key characters: the Nazi Major Strasser, and the Resistance hero Victor Laszlo. Between them, they paint a revealing portrait of a divided continent.

Consider this dialogue from Casablanca, which comes early in the film, when Renault first introduces Strasser to Laszlo:

SOURCE 1

STRASSER: This is a pleasure I've long looked forward to.

LASZLO: I'm sure you'll excuse me if I'm not gracious, but you see, I'm a Czechoslovakian.

STRASSER: You were a Czechoslovakian. Now you are a subject of the German Reich.

LASZLO: I've never accepted that privilege.

This dialogue neatly touches on Europe's confused national loyalties. In 1938, Germany had invaded Czechoslovakia. The Czech people lost their independence, and found their livcs controlled by an occupying German army. In 1939, Germany invaded in Poland. In 1940, Germany invaded Belgium, France, Denmark, Norway... the list goes on. And as each new country fell, the Germans imposed their authority on the men and Paul Henreid as Victor Laszlo women they had conquered.

German aggression was rooted in the ideology of the German leader, Adolf Hitler, and his National Socialist (or 'Nazi') followers. Nazi policy was painfully simple. They planned to reconquer land that they claimed as part of some mythical 'Greater Germany' and then planned to 'purity' this homeland **-** the 'Reich' **-** by killing all those millions of people (notably the Jews and the Slays) who failed to live up to their Nazi ideal.

This Nazi terror was finally ended with the defeat of Germany in 1945. But tragically, in the 12 years between Hitler's rise and Hitler's fall, he had already gone a long way to realising his dream. At its greatest extent, his Empire stretched from Africa to the Arctic, from the English Channel to the Black Sea, from the Spanish Pyrenees to the Ukraine. And in human terms, the enormity of the Nazi terror was so great it is still almost impossible to comprehend; imprisonment and slave labour became everyday realities, and many, many millions of people were murdered.

SOURCE 2

“The people of Distomo have not forgotten the day a Waffen-SS unit drove into their village. During their short stay they committed atrocities that are now’ considered among the worst of the Second World War. Grim accounts suggest that 218 men, women and children were butchered as the Germans ran amok, exacting ‘reprisals' They were not men, they were beasts,” says Timoleon Sfouniouris, aged 64, who survived by hiding in a field. “They killed everyone in sight - even pregnant women.” ... Greece suffered bitterly during the occupation. The charred remains of burnt villages still scar the landscape.”

Bygone war haunts Greece, a report in The Guardian, September 4th 1995.

The realities of occupation varied enormously from country to country. Certainly life under the Nazis was harder in the East than in the West. But everyone faced the same brutal choice: to collaborate’ with the conqueror (i.e. to co-operate with them) or to resist.

Resistance took many forms. At its most simple, it meant constantly reminding the Germans that they were not invited and were not wanted. At its most complex **-** and dangerous **-** it meant sabotaging German goods in the factories, destroying railway lines, helping Allied airmen escape, and even engaging in armed partisan activity. But to be caught was to invite awful reprisals, and not just for oneself. Whole families, at times whole villages, could be killed or imprisoned in revenge for one partisan attack.

SOURCE 3

“No person shall erect or operate any wireless telegraph apparatus without special permission... The possession of and traffic in arms and ammunition is strictly forbidden... Persons making any photograph, sketch, plan or map prejudicial to the safety of the Army of Occupation shall be liable to life imprisonment... Persons engaging in any conspiracy or holding communication with powers other than those participating in the occupation shall be liable to life imprisonment...

German Military Ordinances for use in Occupied Territories, 1941.

SOURCE 4

"Thou shalt obey King Haakon... thou shalt detest Hitler... thou shalt regard as a traitor every Norwegian who keeps company with Germans or Quislings at home.., thou shalt despise treason and remember that its punishment is death..."

From "The Resister's Ten Commandments", distributed by chain letter amongst church-going Norwegians. Vidkun Quisling was made Norwegian Prime Minister by the Germans. His name was used insultingly to describe any collaborator.

SOURCE 5

"In train, tram or in the street, unknown Danes turned to us and offered their help or gave money. Once someone gave me a gold ring, and once in the train a man took off his coat and asked if I'd take it. I could not refuse. I remember one day that the tram conductor refused to accept my fare. I threw the money into his bag. When I got off he said to me in all sincerity, 'I am ashamed' "

Testimony of a Danish Jew. Proportionally, more of Denmark's Jews survived the war than from any other European country. This is a good indicator of the strength of Danish non-collaboration.

SOURCE 6

STRASSER: You know the leaders of the underground movements in Paris, in Prague, in Brussels, in Amsterdam, in Oslo, in Belgrade, in Athens...

LASZLO: Even in Berlin.

STRASSER: Yes. Even in Berlin. If you furnish me with their names and whereabouts, you will have your visa in the morning.

LASZLO: I was in a German concentration camp for a year. If I didn't give you their names in a concentration camp I certainly won't give them to you now. And what if you track down these men and kill them? What if you murdered all of us? From every corner of Europe hundreds, thousands, would rise to take our places. Even Nazis can't kill that fast.

Dialogue from Casablanca.

Task

- In Casablanca, Captain Renault describes Strasser as “one of the reasons the Third Reich enjoys the reputation it has today‘. From the evidence, what do you suppose he meant?

* Try to list all the Resistance activity featured in Casablanca. How would you describe this activity? is it presented as heroic? Purposeful? Desperate? Does it actually achieve anything?
  * Which characters in Casablanca collaborate?
    Does the film always condemn collaboration?
  * Try to imagine why some people co-operated with the Germans. What sort of pressures may have resulted in collaboration?

  * After the war, very few people openly admitted that they had collaborated. Do you think we can trust every account of heroic resistance? Why not?

  * What does SOURCE 2 tell us about the legacy of Nazi Germany in Europe today?

One of the reasons for the dramatic success of Casablanca is the very fact that the Nazi Strasser and the Resistance hero, Laszlo, can meet and talk at all. War films have always had a problem bringing hero and villain together, because usually the particular circumstances of war only allow for meetings in battle. Confrontations at gunpoint or at the end of a bayonet don’t allow for much subtlety on behalf of the scriptwriters.

This explains the success of the spy movie and the prisoner of war movie. Both of these sub-genres allow for interaction between hero and villain and it is this interaction that allows the drama to bristle with tension.

In Casablanca, hero and villain are brought together simply by placing the action in a (supposedly) neutral country, French Morocco. It’s a neat trick **-** but it also needs some explanation, because the relationship between wartime France and Nazi Germany was, to say the least, confusing.

VICHY FRANCE

The invasion of France began on May 10th 1940. Just one month later, the German army entered Paris. And a week after that, the French government surrendered.

Many French patriots felt the surrender was hasty and dishonourable, but the men who signed it - led by the First World War hero Marshal Plan - believed that the surrender was the best way to preserve some dignity in defeat. Under the terms of the surrender, only half of France **-** the northern half - would suffer occupation by the German army. Southern France and the French colonies would be ruled by P6tain and his ministers from the spa town of Vichy.

The 'Vichy Government' was traditional and authoritarian, and had great sympathy and respect for the regime that ruled Germany. So, whilst it intended to salvage French honour by remaining independent of Germany, in reality Vichy simply became a German puppet state. Laws were passed against the Jews, members of the Resistance were hunted down, and thousands of French citizens were sent to Germany as slave labourers.

Not surprisingly, many French citizens opposed Vichy. In London, Charles de Gaulle's Free French movement brought together French patriots who refused to collaborate. And in mainland France, despite the dangers, Resistance movements recruited 40,000 members. In 1944, when the allies eventually liberated France, the Resistance worked behind the German lines to help the allied advance, and the first allied tanks that entered Paris were those of a Free French armoured division.

SOURCE 7

"The French government, alleging the defeat of our armies, has entered into dealings with the enemy to end the fighting. But has the last word been said? Should hope die? Is the defeat total? No! Whatever happens, the flame of French resistance must not and shall not die."

General Charles de Gaulle, broadcasting from London, 18th June 1940.

SOURCE 8

"General de Gaulle, who has spoken on the BBC, no longer belongs to the French Government and is not entitled to make public statements. His announcements should be disregarded."

Vichy radio communique, 20th June 1940.

SOURCE 9

"We should go along with Germany's plans. It will be the best course to preserve France's honour, by collaborating with the New Order being built in Europe. This collaboration should be sincere and not in the least hostile."

Marshal Pétain, 24th October 1940.

SOURCE 10

"Work, Family, Fatherland." The new slogan of Vichy France, replacing the revolutionary slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

SOURCE 11

"What do you expect of me? I am playing my hand presuming that the Germans will win the war. Are they going to win it? As time goes by it gets less likely. There are two men who can help their country, General de Gaulle and myself. If the Germans win the war, maybe I will be able to discuss an honourable peace treaty with them. If the Germans are beaten, de Gaulle will return. He has behind him - I have no illusions on this score - 80 to 90% of the population. As for me, I will be hanged. What difference does it make?"

Pierre Laval, Vichy Prime Minister, talking as the tide turned against Germany in 1943.

...AND CAPTAIN RENAULT

Captain Renault, Casablanca's corrupt but charming police chief is a character that brilliantly captures the two sides of the French people during the war years. On the one hand, Renault is a German stooge. Time and time again he is seen to dance to Strassers tune. He has Ugarte arrested and killed, he has Rick's bar searched and then closed down; he even tips off' Strasser when - he realises Rick is helping Laszlo escape.

But throughout the movie, the audience is aware of Renault's underlying dislike of the Germans. He goads them constantly, for instance, welcoming them proudly to

'unoccupied France'. Claude Rains as Captain Renault. He is, we feel, a patriot at heart; and by the end of the movie he has switched sides accordingly.

Under every Vichyite, the scriptwriters seem to imply, there is a free Frenchman just waiting for the chance to 'do the honourable thing'.

SOURCE 12

RENAULT: My dear Ricky, you overestimate the influence of the Gestapo. I don't interfere with them and they don't interfere with me. In Casablanca, I am the master of my fate. I am captain...

AIDE (interrupting): Malor Strasser is here, sir.
RicK: You were saying?
RENAULT: Excuse me. (HE LEAVES)

Dialogue from Casablanca.

SOURCE 13

STRASSER: Captain, are you entirely certain which side you're on?

RENAULT: I have no conviction, what you mean. I blow with the wind. And the prevailing wind happens to be from Vichy.

STRASSER: And it should change?

RENAULT: Oh, surely the Reich doesn't admit that possibility...

Dialogue from Casablanca.

SOURCE 14

STRASSER: Rick just a blundering American.

RENAULT. Well don't underestimate American blundering. I was with them when they blundered into Berlin in 1918.

Dialogue from Casablanca.

Task

* What does the slogan in SOURCE 10 tell us about the Vichy style o/ government?

* Compare SOURCE 11 with SOURCE 13 In their motives for joining Vichy, what links Captain Renault with Pierre Laval? How would you describe his motive? Is it 'honourable'?

* What is the significance of Renault's rapid departure in SOURCE 12?

* Which historical event does Renault recall in Source 14? Why is it significant that Renault was with the Americans in 1918?

* Study opening sequence of Casablanca, in which Vichy soldiers shoot and kill a Free French agent. How do the filmmakers flag their anti-Vichy sympathies?

AMERICA

America joined the Second World War unwillingly, and late. It wasn't until December 1941 that America joined Britain in the fight against fascism, two years after the British and French declaration of war. During this time America had been helping Britain, by supplying Britain with vital war materials, but officially, America remained neutral.

Why did America join the war so late? Because most Americans, in the years between the First and the Second World Wars, were isolationist. America was a nation of immigrants, many of whom had left Europe oppressed or victimised. In their new world they hoped to live in peace and prosperity, and to guarantee this it seemed necessary to look inwards, to show a cold shoulder to the world and its problems. The First World War had proved the folly of getting involved. I i2,000 Americans had died in what seemed to many an obscure European squabble. In fact many Americans blamed US involvement in the First World War on a conspiracy of fat cat industrialists, who'd grown rich on the sale of arms.

So in the 1930 s as fascism and aggress on gained a foothold in Europe and the Far Fast, conservative politicians in America responded with a series of neutrality laws. And they had the backing of the American people; even as late as 1941 (according to a Gallup poll) 96% of Americans believed that America could - and should **-** stay out of "that phoney war in Europe".

SOURCE 15

"We shun political commitments which might entangle us in foreign wars. I have seen war. I have seen blood running from the wounded. I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs. I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed. I have seen two hundred, limping, exhausted men come out of line - the survivors of a regiment of one thousand that went forward forty eight hours before. I hate war.

American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, August 1936.

SOURCE 16

'An epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. Now, when an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in the quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease."

Roosevelt, October 1937.

SOURCE 17

"1 regret that Congress passed that Act. I regret equally that I signed that Act."

Roosevelt, September 1939, referring to America's law of neutrality.

Task

* From the evidence qitven in SOURCES 15, 16 and 17, would you say President Roosevelt was an isolationist or an anti-isolationist? Or did his opinion change through time?

* In Casablanka, isolationism is equated with selfishness. Is this fair? Imaqine beinq a conservative politician in America in 1941 **-** how else could you justify staying out of the war?

… RICK BLAINE

Just as Captain Renault serves as a symbol of a France torn pro- and anti-Vichy, so Rick Blame serves as a symbol of an America moving from isolationism to interventionism.

In the early scenes of Casablanca, Rick **-** as he puts it - “sticks his neck out for nobody”. He shrugs off Ugarte as French policemen drag him off to prison; he breaks up a fight between French and German soldiers with the neutral disclaimer “either lay off politics or get out!”

But it soon becomes obvious that Rick won’t stay neutral for long. And it’s the tussle in his character between the hard-nosed cynic and the romantic idealist that gives him such appeal. We know the idealist will come out on top; the joy of Casablanca is in watching Ingrid Bergman (as lIsa Bund) weaving her spell and achieving the transformation.

SOURCE 18

“Once we knew that Bogart was going to play the role, we felt he was so right for it that we didn’t have to do anything special. Except we tried to make him as cynical as possible.

Julius J. Epstein, Casablanca scriptwriter.

SOURCE 19

RENAULT: I suspect that under that cynical shell you’re at heart a sentimentalist. ... In 1935, you ran guns to Ethiopia. In 1936, you fought in Spain on the loyalist side.
RICK:And got paid well for it on both occasions.
RENAULT. The winning side would have paid you much better.

Dialogue from Casablanca.

NB. The wars in Ethiopia and Spain both invoked fascist armies: Mussolini's fascists in Ethiopia, and Franco's fascists in Spain. Rick’s involvement on the anti-fascist side in both conflicts ,marks him out as a political liberal.

SOURCE 20

FERRARI: My dear Rick, when will you realise that in this world, today, isolationism is no longer a practical foreign policy? ***Dialogue from Casablanca.***

SOURCE 21

RICK: If it's December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it in New York?

SAM: What? My watch has stopped...

RICK:I bet they're asleep in New York. I bet they're asleep all over America.
Dialogue from Casablanca.

Task

* What do you understand by the word 'cynical' (SOURCE 18)? How are audiences meant to respond to the cynicism that fills Casablanca?

* Why, in SOURCE 19 should Renault consider fighting fascists a sign of 'sentimentality'?

* Compare SOUR CE 20 with SOURCE 16 **-** is the same point being made in both?

* Why, in Casablanca, does Rick eventually stick his neck out'? Plot the incidents that show him becoming increasingly 'involved' - for instance when he lets Jan win at roulette.

* What would audiences in wartime America have made of the dialogue in SOURCE 21?

HOLLYWOOD AND THE NAZIS

Throughout the 1930's, the official line in America was to stay neutral and do nothing which would cause Germany offence. So despite Nazi intolerance within Germany, and German aggression elsewhere in Europe, America made no comment.

But Hollywood was not representative either of the American people or of the American government. The movie industry was always liberal in its politics.

Additionally, in the 1930's Hollywood was flooded with European refugees, many of them Jewish, natural opponents of the Nazis. So Hollywood quickly became a focus for American anti-Nazi activity.

Warner Bros., the studio that made Casablanca, was perhaps the most anti-Nazi of all. Harry and Jack Warner spoke out at anti-Nazi dinners, and gave heavily to anti-Nazi fund-raising organisations. Warner Bros. had pulled out of distribution deals in Germany in 1934, just one year after Adolf Hitler's Nazi party came to power, and long before an anti-Nazi position was fashionable. Then, as Germany invaded one country after another, Warner Bros. withdrew from each, first Austria, then Czechoslovakia, then Poland, then Denmark and so on. Pulling out dented profits but it left principles intact. By comparison, Paramount Pictures, MGM and Fox were all still trading in mainland Germany as late as 1939.

The political climate in Europe was obviously dramatic, and **-** being in the business of telling stories **-** every studio was keen to exploit this dramatic potential. But to attack Germany too openly in a film ran the risk of provoking the anger of the isolationists. Senator Gerald P. Nye, one of the leading isolationists, pushed for a senate hearing in which Jack Warner and other studio heads were charged with war-mongering.

The object of his fury was Confessions of a Nazi Spy, a Warner Bros. film produced in 1938 and released in 1939. It starred Edward G. Robinson as an FBI man uncovering Nazi spy activity in mainland America, and Warner Bros. sold it as a 'wake-up call to America.

SOURCE 22

"Hitler and his government are unfairly represented in this story, in violation of the Code. To represent Hitler as only a screaming madman and a blood-thirsty persecutor and nothing else is manifestly unfair, considering his phenomenal public career, his unchallenged political and social achievement, and his position as head of the most important continental European power.

Production Code review,
Confessions of a Nazi Spy.

Task

* If you were Jack Warner, how would you have responded to the reviewer in SOURCE 22?

* Imagine Casablanca had been released in 1939, and not in 1941. How do you suppose the Production Code would have reviewed it? Remember, the Code was meant to preserve American neutrality.

Confessions of a Nazi Spy caused outrage, even triggering bomb threats. Because of this, subsequent Warner Bros. films treated the Nazi issue more subtly. They found ways to illustrate German aggression, and praise anti-German resistance, with historical melodramas whose contemporary parallels couldn't fail to be noticed.

Juarez (1939), for instance, showed a 19th century revolutionary leader conspiring against the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. Maximillian was a puppet ruler, placed on his throne by the French Emperor Napoleon III. The script-writers were drawing parallels with Hitler's habit of appointing puppet 'Gauleiters' to run occupied territories, notably Czechoslovakia.

In The Sea Hawk (1940), Hollywood looked even further back into history, to the days of the Spanish Armada. In 1588, Spain was the dominant Continental power, threatening Britain by sea. In 1940, Germany was the dominant Continental power, threatening Britain by air. And just as the Battle of Britain was being won by a small band of heroic British pilots, so **-** at least in The Sea Hawk **-** the hopes of the Spanish were dashed by the heroics of a lone sea captain (played suitably enough, by Errol Flynn).

SOURCE 23

"When the ruthless ambitions of a man threaten to engulf the world it becomes the solemn obligation of free men to affirm that the earth belongs to all men and that freedom is the deed and title to the soil on which we exist."

Flora Robson, as Elizabeth 1, addressing Errol Flynn at the climax of The Sea Hawk.

Task

* Explain how SOURCE 23 works as historical metaphor.

* Which film do you suppose delivered its message more successfully, Confessions of a Nazi Spy or The Sea Hawk?

* How do you think a Production Code reviewer would have reacted to The Sea Hawk?

Looking back, it is remarkable that Hollywood ever had to disguise its anti-Nazi leanings in historical melodrama. When America finally declared war on Germany and Japan in December 1941, all that was to change...

HOLLYWOOD AND THE WAR

The war made an immediate impact on life in Hollywood, as it did on every aspect of American life. Being situated on America's west coast **-** and so, in theory, within reach of' Japanese bombers **-**Hollywood's first reaction was one of defensiveness. Studio sound stages were camouflaged, aeroplane spotters were posted on the roofs, and air-raid shelters dug. When the bombs failed to materialise, Hollywood latched onto other more glamorous aspects of the wartime life. Jack Warner, for instance, accepted a commission in the army, insisted everyone call him 'Colonel', and had the costume department run him up a uniform.

But most importantly, the war affected production. The need for the nation to conserve its resources - always vital in wartime **-** led to serious rationing of materials. Suddenly set designers found themselves unable to use balsa wood, aluminium and copper. Costume designers found themselves without silk. If spiders' webs in the horror films of the war years have a rather lopsided feel, it's because special effects designers were forced to use glue rather than the more satisfactory rubber cement.

The most punishing restriction was on cellulose, one oft-he ingredients of gunpowder, but also the basic raw material of film stock.

SOURCE 24

“The thoughtless waste of one hundred feet of film - because a carelessly suspended microphone casts a shadow across an actor’s face, or a player rushes into a scene missing cues - may cost the life of an American soldier who may be your son or your brother”

Harry Warner, speaking to Warner Bros. employees in 1941.

Every one of the 1,700 movies made in the war years was made in these austere conditions. It is testament to the great ingenuity of Hollywood’s craftsmen that audiences rarely spot the compromises made. In the final scene of Casablanca, for instance, who could guess that the aeroplanes in the background are fake half-sized cut-outs, draped in fog to cheat the perspective?

What’s even more extraordinary is that Hollywood kept producing movies at all. In every other branch of American life, frivolity and luxury was being abolished to boost war production. Factories producing vacuum cleaners and automobiles, for instance, closed down for the duration. And what is more frivolous and luxurious than cinema? But Hollywood flourished. War was even good for business; Warner Bros. annual profits rose from $5.4 million in 1941 to $8.5 million in 1942.

The reason Hollywood survived the war years was simple; the government had decided film making was an ‘essential industry’. In the eyes of the government, movies weren’t a luxury. They could play a part in winning the war. This process worked in three ways:

Firstly, studio publicity machines could be used to sell war bonds, a type of government security that the public could buy to help finance the war effort. By the end of the war, a third of the $350 billion war bonds sold had been shifted by movie stars or in movie theatres.

Secondly, the studios could make training and information films. Warner Bros. made over 600 of these during the war.

Thirdly, and most significantly, the very subject matter of Hollywood movies could be used to reflect- issues raised by the war. In other words Hollywood could become part of the American propaganda machine...

PROPAGANDA

SOURCE 25

'I've been watching a part of the world blown to pieces! It is as if the lights were out everywhere, except in America. Keep those lights burning there! 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."

Final speech of Foreign Correspondent (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940),
a movie which follows the adventures of an American journalist in Nazi Europe.

SOURCE 26

'Foreign Correspondent is a masterpiece of propaganda, a first class production which will make a certain impression upon the broad masses of the people in enemy countries."

German Reichsminister for Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels.

The word 'propaganda' describes the spreading of information deliberately intended to flatter your own cause whilst damaging the cause of your enemy. Propaganda has always been a vital weapon of war, because it's hard to fight a war when morale is low. So wartime governments try to keep people happy and motivated, and they do this by stressing how bad the enemy are, how important it is 'we' defeat 'them', and how well the fight is going.

In the Second World War propaganda was used as never before. In Germany, Reichsminister Joseph Goebbels practised new and cynical ways of controlling the minds of the German people. He ensured that all the media - newspapers, radio, films, newsreels **-** were supervised and vetted by Nazi officials. Everything from school textbooks to street posters boosted Nazi Party ideology at the expense of Germany's so-called enemies.

SOURCE 27

"We saw a billboard larger than any I have ever seen, and on the billboard was a caricature of a Jew, and it said in huge letters, MURDERER, THIEF We'd sit in our apartment and hear the marching fret outside."

Murray Burnett, describing Nazi-controlled Vienna. Murray Burnett was the author of Everyone Comes to Rick's, the stage play on which Casablanca was based.

Task

* In SOURCE 26, Why does Joseph Goebbels praise a film that is critical of the Nazis?

* Compare Foreign Correspondent (SOURCE 25) with the billboard mentioned in SOURCE 27. Which do you think is the more effective propaganda?

In a totalitarian state like Nazi Germany it is simple to spread propaganda, because the government is in total control. Even if people know they are being fed lies they have no choice but to listen. In a democracy like America, things aren't so simple. The people entrust government officials with power, and spreading propaganda **-** even for the best of motives **-** could be seen as an abuse of that trust.

SOURCE 28

"The American motion picture is one of our most effective media in informing and entertaining our citizens. The motion picture must remain free, insofar as national security will permit. I want no censorship of the motion picture; I want no restrictions placed thereon which will impair the usefulness of the film other than those very necessary restrictions which the dictates of safety make imperative...

President Roosevelt, 24th December 1941.

But propaganda was used in democratic America. In the press, on the radio and in the cinema, the pro-war message was everywhere. The government set up an Office of War Information, with the job of explaining the war to the American people and instilling the will to win. And in Hollywood, to work alongside the studio chiefs, they set up the Bureau of' Motion Pictures.

SOURCE 29

American propaganda poster, 1942.
Imperial War Museum, London

SOURCE 30

I THE ISSUES
Why we fight. What kind of peace will follow victory.

II. THE ENEM'Y
Whom we fight. The nature of our adversary.

III. THE UNITED NATIONS AND PEOPLES
With whom are we allied in fighting. Our brothers-in-arms.

IV WORK AND PRODUCTION
How each of us can fight. The war at home.

V THE HOME FRONT
What we must do. What we must give up to win the fight.

VI. THE FIGHTING FORCES
The job of the fighting man at the front.

Bureau of Motion Pictures manual:
chapter headings.

SOURCE 31

"Will this picture help win the war? ... Does it merely use the war as the basis for a profitable picture, contributing nothing of real significance to the war effort? ... Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda?"

Bureau of Motion Pictures, memo to studio chiefs listing suggested questions they should ask themselves before starting production on a movie.

Task

* Is there a contradiction between SOURCE 28 and SOURCES 30 and 31? How do you explain that contradiction?

* What do you think President Roosevelt means when he says that the motion picture must remain free "insofar as national security will permit…"?

* Look through the chapter headinqs in SOURCE 30. How many of the issues listed are touched on in Casablanca?

* What does the. Final question in SOURCE 31 say about American attitudes to propaganda? Would Goebbels have bothered asking this question in Germany?

* How do you interpret the image in SOURCE 29? Is it 'truth 'or 'propaganda'?

Studio chiefs in Hollywood quickly denied claims that they were making propaganda. They pointed to the profits they were earning and argued that profit, not politics, was guiding their activities. And they had a point. The war certainly featured in Hollywood movies, but often simply because it had dramatic appeal. If a story needed a villain, a Nazi usually fitted the bill. Trivial spy movies were churned out with extraordinary frequency (to the annoyance of the Bureau of Motion Pictures), and in the truly dreadful Tarzan Triumphs (RKO, 1943) the Nazis even battle it out with jungle animals.

But as has been discussed in the section on Hollywood and the Nazis, Hollywood did have a strong liberal conscience. Whilst the studio heads baulked at being called 'propagandists', they were natural opponents of the Nazis. So it's hardly surprising if films like Casablanca were applauded by the government for the brilliant way they sold the war.

THE MESSAGE GE OF CASABLANCA

When four members of the Bureau of Motion Pictures saw Casablanca on October 26th, 1942, they gave **it** a glowing review. From the standpoint of' the war information programme, it could hardly have been bettered. The film showed that "personal desires must be subordinated to the task of defeating fascism". It "graphically illustrated the chaos and misery which fascism and the war has brought". America was shown as "the haven of the oppressed and homeless". And in touching on Rick's anti-fascist background, audiences were helped to understand "that the roots of' aggression reach far back".

Task

***** What situations and dialogue in Casablanca illustrate each of the four points listed above?

* How subtly is each message interwoven into the story? Do you feel the message ever spoils the drama?

There is, however, a further message in Casablanca, one not mentioned in the Bureau of' Motion Pictures' review. It concerns the relationship between America and her allies.

One of the points the war information programme was keen to stress (listed as point 3 of' SOURCE 31) was that America was not fighting the war against Germany alone. In some ways Casablanca makes this point well. It shows, for instance, a variety of Resistance activity. There's the Free French agent with a fistful of' leaflet-s in the opening scene, the Norwegian Berger who makes contact with Laszlo when he first arrives in Casablanca, the Resistance meeting which Laszlo addresses whilst Rick and lisa kiss dreamily in Rick's flat... And then of course there's Victor Laszlo himself, proud and heroic, boasting to Strasser of the 'thousands' that will rise for every Resistance fighter killed.

But this picture of allied resistance seems curiously half-hearted. The Resistance is seen as disorganised, skulking, fearful; when their meetings are disrupted, they cut themselves on windows scurrying clear. The French, in particular, come in for criticism. Renault's politics 'blow with the wind'. Yvonne, Rick's girlfriend at the start oft-he movie, reacts to his leaving her by flirting with a German soldier. There is a feeling that honour in Europe is somehow compromised.

And Laszlo, let's face **it,** is a very strange kind of hero. He's cold, a wet fish. He's frankly rather unlikeable. Why should this be, if the filmmakers' intentions were really to glorify America's allies?

SOURCE 32

"Casablanca set Paid Henreid as a stiff. He was such a pompous, earnest man in Casablanca that you think, My God, that poor girl going back to that guy? Before that, he was a sort of romantic star in Europe. But when you play a square it doesn't do you much good. Afterwards he didn't play the heroes anymore.

Pauline Kael, film critic, on the damage playing Victor Laszlo did to Paul Henreid's career.

Perhaps it's best to turn the question on its head. To ask, not why the filmmakers are half hearted in their praise oft-he allies, but, how 'doing down' the allies reflects on America. Consider these two sections of dialogue from

Casablanca, both of which come as the film draws to it-s conclusion:

SOURCE 33

ILSA: Oh, I don't know what's right any longer. You'll have to think for both of us, for all of us.

RICK:All right, I will. Here's looking at you, kid.

ILSA: I wish I didn't love you so much.

SOURCE 34

LASZLO (FO RICK): Welcome back to the fight. This time I know our side will win.

Task

* Who does Ilsa mean by 'all of us'?

* What message is being flagged to American audiences in SOURCE 34?

* If Ilsa and Laszlo represent the European Resistamice, and Rick represents America, what do these two sources tell us about American's wartime self-image?

Casablanca seems to be peddling an attitude commonly felt in America during the war years. Ordinary Americans understood, eventually, that isolationism was 'no longer a practical policy' - that Nazi Germany was evil and that to fight evil was a moral necessity.

But, throughout, the feeling remains that America only had to help Europe because Europe was failing to help itself. Rugged, cynical America would play the hero if called upon **-** and win, of course, because that's what heroes do - but let no one forget this wasn't America s war. And by showing America as the handsome stranger, stepping in to settle someone else's fight, Americans could bask in a glory somehow doubly heroic...

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