

Lawrence Baron

Professor Emeritus Lawrence Baron held the Nasatir Chair of Modern Jewish History at San Diego State University from 1988 until 2012 and directed its Jewish Studies Program until 2006. He received his Ph.D. in modern European cultural and intellectual history from the University of Wisconsin where he studied with George L. Mosse. He taught at St. Lawrence University from 1975 until 1988. He has authored and edited four books including *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* (Brandeis University Press: 2011) and *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Rowman and Littlefield: 2005). He served as the historian and as an interviewer for Sam and Pearl Oliner's *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*. In 2006 he delivered the keynote address for Yad Vashem's first conference devoted to Hollywood and the Holocaust. His contribution to Holocaust Studies was profiled in *Fifty Key Thinkers on the Holocaust and Genocide* (Routledge: 2010). In the fall Semester of 2015, he served as the Ida King Distinguished Visiting Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Richard Stockton University of New Jersey.

TALKS:

To book a talk, contact Lawrence Baron at 619-583-8842 or LBARON@sdsu.edu

The Irish-Jewish Couple in American Feature Films

From *Abie's Irish Rose* to *Keeping the Faith*, Irish-Jewish love stories have been a common theme in American movies. This talk examines how these romances have conveyed varying messages from extolling the "Melting Pot" ideal, exposing inter-ethnic tensions, epitomizing interfaith toleration, and embracing multicultural diversity. It will be illustrated with clips from silent and more recent films.

Statuettes of Limitations: The Oscars and the Holocaust, 1945-1960

The Oscars constitute Hollywood's recognition of the movies which were the most cinematically, financially, or socially significant in the year of their release. Between

1945 and 1960, a number of documentaries and a feature films relating to the Holocaust garnered Oscars or nominations. Based on how they depicted the Shoah, this lecture traces the contours of American awareness of the Holocaust in those years.

Kristallnacht on Film: From Reportage to Reenactments, 1938-1988

In the absence of firsthand footage of Kristallnacht, newsreels, documentaries, and feature films employed a range of approaches to depict it in the ensuing decade. This lecture traces the evolution these cinematic images within chronological and national contexts. Clips of these portrayals of Kristallnacht will be screened.

Picturing Prejudice: The Cinematic Depiction of American Anti-Semitism

This lecture traces the evolution of Hollywood films about American anti-Semitism from the generic anti-prejudice movies of the Thirties and postwar social problem movies like *Gentleman's Agreement* to recent films like which place anti-Jewish discrimination in the past or treat it as an expression of interracial tensions.

Hollywood and the Holocaust: From Appeasement to Anti-Nazism, 1933–1945
After a period of self-censorship to assure the screening of American films in Nazi Germany, the Hollywood studios eventually made films opposing Hitler and alerting American audiences to Germany's persecution of the Jews, This lecture traces the evolution of this process and the domestic factors that influenced it.

American Jewish Women Directors: From Joan Micklin-Silver to Jill Soloway

Although Jewish women have always been part of making American films as actresses and screenwriters, their entry into the ranks of directors has been slow. Several notable Jewish female directors emerged on the scene in the 1970s who brought both a Jewish and feminist perspective to their films. This lecture will profile these directors starting with the pioneers Joan Micklin-Silver (*Hester Street* and *Crossing Delancey*), Claudia Weil (*Girlfriends*), Barbra Streisand (*Yentl* and *The Prince of Tides*), and Susan Seidelman (*Desperate Seeking Susan*) to a new generation of Jewish women directors like Lena Dunham (*Girls*) and Jill Soloway (*Transparent*) who have pushed the sexual and religious boundaries of how Jewish women are depicted.

The Armenian/Jewish Connection: Holocaust and Armenian Genocide Films

Before the advent of the Holocaust, Europe's Jews often cited the Armenian Genocide as a precedent for the Holocaust. The Turkish campaign to deny that the Armenian Genocide occurred and the proliferation of Holocaust films turned the tables around. This lecture looks at how the Holocaust films influenced Armenian Genocide films.

***The Jazz Singer* from the Melting Pot to Multicultural America.**

Since it premiered in 1927, *The Jazz Singer* has been considered the paradigmatic film about the Americanization of the children of Jewish immigrants. The movie has inspired remakes on the theme of the son's rebellion against his father's traditions. This lecture examines how and why subsequent versions altered the original plotline.

Not in Kansas Anymore: Holocaust Movies for Children

As the Holocaust increasingly has been incorporated into public education, feature films, often based on juvenile Holocaust fiction or classic children's novels are being made. This lecture looks at this trend starting with Disney's *The Devil in Vienna* through *The Boy in Striped Pajamas*.

Crescent and Star-Crossed Lovers: Jewish-Muslim Romance Films

From the silent era to the talkies, Jewish-Christian love stories either challenged theological prohibitions against exogamy or the romantic ideal that love can transcend differences. This lecture examines why the cinematic trope of the unlikely Jewish-Christian couple has been supplanted recently by that of the Jewish-Muslim couple.

The Third Generation Imagines the Holocaust in Film

As the Holocaust recedes further into the past, the number of survivors inevitably will dwindle until no one will be alive who endured its horrors. The stories they recounted or withheld from their offspring and the lingering impact of trauma on parenting provide oblique links to the calamity experienced by European Jewry during World War Two. How that legacy has been projected onto the screen by Third Generation screenwriters and directors is the subject of this talk.

Rebels with an Aryan Cause: The Neo-Nazi in American Films

Ever since the end of World War Two, the specter of a Nazi resurgence has haunted the cinematic imagination. Tainted by the horrific legacy of the Third Reich, neo-Nazis were traditionally portrayed as mad scientists, political extremists, and sadistic villains who could be easily thwarted by American democracy. Given the resurgence of neo-Nazism starting in the 1980s as a backlash to civil rights progress, immigration from non-European countries, and the unemployment attributed to globalization, movies have increasingly depicted neo-Nazis as characters confronting real social problems even though the violent solutions they offer to solve them only triggers more violence.

Jewish-Gentile Romances: From Abie to Zohan in American Films

From the silent era to the talkies, Jewish-Gentiles movie romances have provided plotlines to promote vastly different agendas: the Melting Pot ideal (*Abie's Irish Rose*), traditional resistance to intermarriage (*Tevye the Milkman*), American support of Israel (*Exodus*), identity politics (*The Way We Were*). Multiculturalism (*Keeping the Faith*), and changing perceptions of Israel (*You Don't Mess with the Zohan*).

Hollywood's First Wave of "Holocaust" Films: From Frank Sinatra to Anne Frank

Although most people assume that Hollywood avoided the subject of the Holocaust until the release of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1959, feature films dealing with the subject started to appear immediately after the end of World War Two. This lecture traces how Hollywood depicted the Shoah in films produced between 1945 and 1959.

Christian Holocaust Films: From Resistance to Indifference

This lecture traces the evolution of cinematic depictions of Christian individuals and churches to the plight of the Jews under Nazism from early anti-Nazi films like *Pastor Hall* (1940) to evangelical movies like *The Hiding Place* (1975), and exposes of Christian indifference like *Amen* (2002). It will be illustrated with clips from these movies.

Serious Humor: Holocaust Comedy Films

A survey of how humor has been used to satirize Nazi Germany and sympathize with the plight of its victims. Clips from *The Great Dictator*, *The Producers*, *Seven Beauties*, *Genghis Cohn*, *Life Is Beautiful* and *Train of Life* will be screened to illustrate the differing ways comedy has been employed to represent the Holocaust.

The Dynamics of Decency: Why Righteous Gentiles Rescued Jews

Drawing on interviews with Christian rescuers of Jews, this lecture examines the childhood backgrounds, personality traits, politics, religious beliefs, and social networks that led them to shield Jews from the Nazis.

The Reluctant Rescuer from *Schindler's List* to *Hotel Rwanda*

This lecture traces and accounts for the shift from the image of rescuers of victims of genocide and persecution as courageous heroes like Raoul Wallenberg to more morally ambiguous characters like Oskar Schindler and Paul Ruseabagina.

What Americans Read When They Read About the Holocaust

This lecture looks at the perennial best-selling Holocaust books and why they appeal to a diverse spectrum of the American reading public. Though Anne Frank, Primo Levi, and Elie Wiesel are obviously on this top-ten list, the other works on it range from children's books to Christian Evangelical memoirs.

TESTIMONIALS

“Thank you for delivering an excellent talk on the way movies portrayed the Jewish immigrant experience. The film clips you showed combined with your perceptive comments on their historical context resulted in an enjoyable and informative experience for everyone who attended. Noah Hadas, San Diego Center for Jewish Culture

“With his encyclopedic knowledge of film history, training as a cultural historian, and humor of an old time stand-up comedian, Laurie Baron's lectures are at once wonderfully entertaining and full of brilliant insights into the image of Jews, past and present, on the silver screen around the world.”

Robert Rosenstone, California Institute of Technology

“Words cannot accurately express how much your presence and scholarship enhances the Beth El community. The films you choose provide each of us with much to think about as well an enlightening discussion after their viewing. You facilitate the discussions with great ease and with respect for all the participants.”

Rabbi Avi Libman, Congregation Beth El, La Jolla, CA

“Thank you for your wonderfully insightful lecture on *The Jazz Singer* and the ways in which its various remakes have elaborated upon the original version.” Dr. Leonard Wallock, Associate Director, Walter Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life, University of California, Santa Barbara.

“Dr. Baron gives a stimulating and enjoyable talk, which both entertains as well as illuminates. He has that rare ability to make scholarship come alive, even to a lay audience.” Jeffrey Blutinger, Director of the Jewish Studies Program, California State University, Long Beach.

“We were extremely pleased with the turnout at your event and at the quality and professionalism of your talk and your interaction with the audience. The lecture was fun, smooth, informal, well structured, and engaging--all we could ask for.” Arthur Brenner, Director of the Jewish Studies Program, University of Albany.

REVIEWS: *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema*

“Readers should appreciate the scholarly text *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema*, edited by Lawrence Baron. It reckons with *Grand Illusion*, *The Pawnbroker*, *The Chosen*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and *Ushpizin*, among others, with several dozen abridged treatments by professors from Harvard, Yale, Brandeis, Tel Aviv University, and so on, plus by J. Hoberman Baron manages to give each writer enough space to offer close readings of the films in question and to locate them in their national, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. And if you happen not to like the movies that Baron chose in consultation with his contributors, he includes an appendix listing another hundred or so alternatives.” Josh Lambert, *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*

“Lawrence Baron, has assembled an ambitious collection of new and old essays aiming to cover more than a century of cinematic representations of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism dispersed over a wide geographical area. As an edited volume of essays, some of which were previously published and others that were specially commissioned, it is clearly pitched at the student market, aiming to provide, in a single volume, a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, guide to the Jewish experience on film. In that respect it largely succeeds.” Nathan Abrams, *The Forward*.

"For those looking for an intelligent collection of film criticism for a course on the image of the Jew in motion pictures of the past 80 years, this is it. Film selection is impeccable; there is plenty of Woody Allen. Knowing that he could not include every favorite film in the anthology, Baron provides an "alternative films" list to calm the reader who finds a favorite film omitted. .Highly recommended."—Sol Gittelman, *Choice*.

REVIEWS: *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present*

“Some authors provide sound scholarship, others supply detailed analysis, but few combine these accomplishments with prose that bridges the gap from the academic to the general reader. Historian Lawrence Baron has done just that. This author points to the

complexities of history, filmmaking, and cultural perceptions by contextualizing his work within classic films of the Shoah (from 1945-1979) while identifying trends and shifts in how stories of the Holocaust are now brought to the screen in the twenty-first century. Deborah Carmichael," *Film and History*

Combining scrupulous research and keen insight with prior film criticism and artistic, social, and historical information, Baron renders this somber and difficult subject most accessible. The study is distinguished by the various schools of thought on how Holocaust subjects should or should not be treated on film. The author avoids repeating and recycling ideas, instead juxtaposing new findings and insights with established views, thereby delivering well-rounded and informative coverage of a dynamic subject with myriad facets and repercussions...An excellent resource for those interested in film or in political science, history, or psychology. . Essential. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty and professionals. L. D. Talit *Choice*

I wish to recommend this book without reservation to anyone even remotely interested in the subject. For me, it serves as reality check in my memory, and delineates what "bearing witness" means. To the reader, it may provide invaluable insights on what can be done to explain the inexplicable. Frank Manchel *Journal Of Popular Film And Television*.

"Offers rich, detailed, and thoughtful analysis of international holocaust film by an author who has been teaching classes on Jewish History and the Holocaust for many years. . . . This is an important book on an important topic and should be in all film collections." Eleanor Block *Communication Book Notes Quarterly*