

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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SCREENING AND DISCUSSION OF BEFORE HINDSIGHT, DOCUMENTARY ON BRITISH NEWSREEL COVERAGE OF NAZI ERA, AT MoMA DECEMBER 9

Disguised images of the rise of National Socialism in Germany--represented by British newsreels at the time as objective, balanced accounts--are the subject of Before Hindsight. The feature-length documentary, which will be screened Monday, December 9 at 3:00 p.m. in The Museum of Modern Art's Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2, will be introduced by Professor Brian Winston, chairperson of the Department of Cinema Studies in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Following the screening Professor Winston will lead a discussion of the censorship issues raised in the film.

This landmark investigation reveals how British newsreels of the thirties distorted news events and withheld information concerning the rise of Hitler's Germany prior to World War Two. Directed and edited by Jonathan Lewis in Great Britain in 1977, the 78-minute film contains on-camera commentary by James Cameron.

The program has been organized by William Sloan, librarian in the Museum's Department of Film, which is sponsoring the event with the Film/Video and Intellectual Roundtables of the New York Library Association. The annual meeting of the New York Library Association is being held in New York, December 8 - 11.

Before Hindsight uses extensive footage from the Movietone, Pathé, March of Time, and Paramount newsreels of the thirties, including material shot but never released by the companies for fear of commercial damage. As some of the newsreel makers now explain in interviews, entertainment value and the film companies' perceptions of public opinion weighed more heavily in the creation of these newsreels than the need to report the news. Although there was no official censorship, filmmakers active at the time testify that government influence was both strong and pervasive. As a result, the arrival in London of Jewish refugee children turned into a story about the generosity of the British people to all mankind, and Mussolini was shown as a spokesman for peace.

A discussion of today's television reports, heirs to the newsreel, concludes Before Hindsight. According to the filmmakers, current reporting is a vast improvement on that of the thirties. The ideology of journalistic balance, of the reporter as objective truthseeker, may however disguise propaganda today as effectively as it did during the rise of fascism.

Before Hindsight is from the collection of the Circulating Film Library of the Museum's Department of Film, which has recently acquired the film for national distribution. Inquiries for the rental or sale of 16mm prints of the film may be addressed to the Circulating Film Library, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019; or telephone 212/708-9530.

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For further press information, contact Howard Feinstein, film press representative, The Museum of Modern Art 212/708-9752.