

## Program explores how cinema, radio and media informed Americans during Nazi-era



The New Bedford Theatre in 1934. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum will present *What Were We Watching? Americans' Responses to Nazism Through Cinema, Radio and Media* in Miami and Boca Raton, where speakers explore these forms of communication throughout the 1930-40s. (Spinner Publications/Courtesy)



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South Floridians have two opportunities to learn from speakers on how Americans received information on the Nazi persecution of Europe's Jews through cinema, radio and media during the 1930's-40's at an upcoming local program presented by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This program, called *What Were We Watching? Americans' Responses to Nazism Through Cinema, Radio and Media*, takes place on Dec. 10 at Miami-Dade College's Wolfson Campus in Downtown Miami and on Dec. 11 at B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton. The program begins at 7 p.m. both evenings.

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During this upcoming program, panelists will discuss how Hollywood and leaders in entertainment and government battled for the hearts and minds of Americans as stories about World War II and the persecution of Europe's Jews were a constant presence in American movie theaters and living rooms throughout the 1930's-40s. Award-winning films such as "Mrs. Miniver," "The Great Dictator" and "Casablanca" helped to shape Americans' understanding of the Nazi threat, while newsreels and radio programs offered a brief glimpse into world events and the range of opinions on the war effort.

"This program helps us to understand how Americans were being informed and educated about the Nazi threat during the 1930s and 40s through the variety of different mediums available at that time," said Robert Tanen, the USHMM's Southeast regional director. "It's important to know the depths of influence that the entertainment industry and political leaders had in creating awareness to Nazism and the threat to European Jews during World War II."

Panelists for the Miami event will be Daniel Greene, historian and curator of the Americans and the Holocaust exhibition at the USHMM, and David Weinstein, author of "The Eddie Cantor Story: A Jewish Life in Performance and Politics," and contributor to "Why Sarnoff Slept: NBC and the Holocaust." The Boca Raton event's panelists will be Gretchen Skidmore, the museum's director for education initiatives, and Weinstein. Rick Hirsch, managing editor for the *Miami Herald*, will be the moderator for both evenings.

Greene noted that this is the first touring public program that brings the content of the Americans and the Holocaust exhibition to communities outside of Washington.

When asked what he hopes audiences can take away from the upcoming presentation, Greene responded, "Like *Americans and the Holocaust, What Were We Watching?* reveals that Americans had access to significant information about the dangers of Nazism in real time during the 1930's and '40s. Knowing this, we hope audiences will then ask a difficult question: 'If Americans knew so much at the time, why didn't rescue of Jews become a priority for the U.S. government or for the vast majority of the American people?'"

Greene said the program will include clips from newsreels, films and radio that shed new light on how Americans thought about the dangers of Nazism.

"We hope that these clips will help audiences understand the range of American responses to Nazis. Some Americans may have ignored information about the threats faced by Europe's Jews, others were indifferent and a small number of Americans decided to take action to help rescue Jews."

Weinstein said, "Our presentation will take audience members back in time and explore the challenges and the possibilities of political activism in 1930s America."

"Our panel discussion and multi-media presentation will examine the media landscape and how the media presented and responded to Nazism and anti-Semitism."

Weinstein is honored to be speaking in South Florida about the topic.

"I grew up near Miami and my grandparents lived in Boca Raton. I know that people in the area have a great interest in history. I am thrilled to return to South Florida for these presentations."

Program is free and open to the public both evenings, but advance registration is required. Visit [ushmm.org/online-calendar](http://ushmm.org/online-calendar) to register. Contact the museum's Southeast Regional office at 561-995-6773 or [southeast@ushmm.org](mailto:southeast@ushmm.org) for more information.

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