

KLAUS KREIMEIER. *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II is quickly fading into memory, but the history of Germany in the twentieth century continues to be dominated by the long shadow of Nazism and the Holocaust. The past fifty years of German scholarship has been characterized by the inescapability of the period 1933-1945, and the historiography reflects this fact. The Sonderweg (special path) debate centered around defining German history in terms of explaining the rise of Hitler, and the Historikerstreit (historian's conflict) of the 1980s tried to historicize Nazism and the Holocaust.

The history of Ufa, Germany's most influential film company of the interwar period, is intricately tied to these questions, as German interwar film has been accused of a rightist slant that paved the way for National Socialism and, after 1933, helped the Nazi regime manipulate the German film-going public. The company both began and ended its existence as the servant of a nationalistic German state. Yet at the same time, Universum-Film AG was a cultural and technical pioneer, a major player in the international development of film as a new medium for artistic and popular expression. Klaus Kreimeier addresses both perspectives in *The Ufa Story*, attacking the thesis that Ufa was little more than a platform for the Right while recognizing the role Ufa played in the rise of Nazism and the support of the Nazi state. Kreimeier reconciles the paradox of Ufa by creating a dichotomy between a leadership linked to the state and conservative business interests and a rank-and-file of producers, directors, and technicians who asserted an artistic and professional independence that established Ufa's claim to greatness.

The genesis of Ufa goes back to World War I, and the desire of the German High Command to create a national film company that could coordinate propaganda in support of the German war effort. The company survived the German defeat, its financial existence transferred from the state to the German Bank and private shareholders in 1921, and was able to assert itself in the chaotic early years of the Weimar Republic. Although Ufa only produced 57 of the 545 films made in Germany in 1920, its vertical organization gave it a disproportionate influence through its control over distribution and exhibition (Ufa owned 91 theaters by 1925, including many film "palaces" where film premiers took place) as well as production. Ironically, while it survived the hyperinflation of the early twenties relatively intact, its overaggressive expansionary policies led it to financial crisis in 1925 and forced it into a submissive deal with American film companies. A new dis-

tribution organization, "Parufamet"—an amalgam of Paramount, Ufa, and MGM—was created, and Ufa was forced to commit to releasing forty American films a year in Germany, further weakening its position.

In 1927, Ufa was "rescued" through the intervention of the conservative businessman Alfred Hugenberg, and its management shifted to the Right. Despite calls for a more nationalist orientation for German film, however, Kreimeier argues that commercial demands and public tastes kept the level of politicization in films low. He acknowledges that right-leaning films were made, and Ufa's leading figures included conservatives like the scriptwriter Thea von Harbon, but they were only one element in Ufa's diverse ideological spectrum. Even into the 1930s, the technical quality of Ufa films remained high, despite demands from Hugenberg and Ufa directors for less "escapism" and more politically-oriented material.

When the Nazis rose to power in 1933, they found a film industry willing to cooperate with them. Despite some dissenting voices on both sides, "On all fundamental matters government and film industry were in agreement" (p. 225). Indeed, the creation of a Film Credit Bank by the new regime benefited large companies like Ufa at the expense of small producers, and steps toward the consolidation of the German film industry were essentially in accord with the Spio plan introduced by industry leaders several years before. Ufa speedily carried out the "cleansing" of its ranks of Jews and the politically unreliable demanded by the new regime, and an exodus of some of its best talent followed (many of whom ended up in Hollywood). This and the collapse of its export markets hurt Ufa, but were countered in part by a steady rise in theater attendance throughout the 1930s. The state imposed a system of "positive" censorship based on a system of tax breaks, loans, and other perks for films of "national value," and the industry voluntarily cooperated. A gradual assimilation of Ufa into the state apparatus followed, with a transition back to state ownership by 1937.

Although the company had transformed, the films themselves had not. Again, Kreimeier contrasts the willing collaborators at the top with the resistance of the rank-and-file, who continued to produce films that "offered vicarious experience, an antidote against propaganda and politics" (p. 216). A few blatantly propagandistic films were released, but it was clear that the public wanted more of the pure "entertainment" films that had built Ufa into an industry leader in the 1920s. Although Kreimeier catalogs a number of directors, "cinema sergeants" like Karl Ritter, who enthusiastically joined forces with the Nazi regime and its message, most films remained "unpolitical" and

many directors, actors, and other film professionals tried “neutrality” as an alternative to full support of the regime and its policies. Since open opposition to the Nazi order was virtually impossible, these neutrals become the heroes of the Ufa story.

The coming of World War II both brought “a peak of prosperity” for Ufa, and the final destruction of its artistic legacy. The “escape” films became more popular to a population facing increasing suffering, even as the nationalist message in Ufa films became more and more blatant. Ufa’s professionals continued making movies until the very end; by then, however, there was hardly anyone left who believed in the simplistic alternative realities and nationalist messages a bankrupt regime foisted on them.

Kreimeier is good at putting Ufa’s story into historical context; he describes how the emergence and development of the company was intricately tied to the tumultuous events of the time. He writes with an episodic flair, and frequently leaves the narrative to digress into the story of a particular actor, director, or film. This makes the book a bit disjointed at times, but adds a degree of depth sometimes lacking in business histories and makes the book more accessible to the nonhistorian.

General readers and those familiar with film history will get different things from the book. Kreimeier is thin on general developments in film except when they impact on Ufa, and other players in the German film industry are only peripherally mentioned. To be fair, this book is intended to tell Ufa’s story, not that of the German film industry, but it is easy to forget that in the late 1920s Ufa controlled only about 7 percent of German production and at the same time the U.S. film industry controlled upwards of 97 percent of the world market (by Kreimeier’s own estimates), and had heavily penetrated the German market. Even under Nazi rule foreign films remained popular, at the same time that German companies like Ufa found it harder and harder to export their own products. Kreimeier does offer some chapters on Ufa’s influence outside of Germany, but they are very brief.

Kreimeier’s argument does not quite amount to an apology for Ufa, although at times his dichotomy of “bad” managers and “good” producers seems a bit thin. Although he asserts the persistent artistic autonomy of German film well into the Nazi period, and highlights the limits of state control over the film establishment, he admits the role that Ufa played in manipulating the German masses and perpetuating the message first of the conservative Right and later of the National Socialists. In the end the belief of those in German film that they could maintain their “art” and remain politically

disconnected proved a fantasy, the same sort of self-deception that many Germans had to come to grips with following the war. Ultimately, however, Kreimeier successfully demonstrates that characterizing Ufa as simply a tool of the conservative Right or the Nazi state is simplistic and misleading. His convincing and detailed analysis of the complicated relationships between government, business, ideology, and artistry in the history of Ufa makes *The Ufa Story* an necessary addition to the reading list of anyone interested in the history of film.

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PAGE SMITH. *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

While no historiographical consensus can be expected to remain unchallenged, a good candidate for such consensus is the idea that the removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II was due to American racism. Historians from the late 1940s to the present have concluded almost unanimously that the removal was not due to military necessity at all, but to a racist mindset variously attributed to the Hearst press and white West Coast farmers, to the U.S. military, to the Roosevelt Administration, or to all three.¹ Not only historians, but all three branches of the federal government, after Japanese-American organizations campaigned long and hard for redress, are now formally on record with apologies to those who suffered loss of property and jobs, poor living conditions in the relocation camps, and public stigma solely due to race rather than to any individual actions.²

But Page Smith, in his last book, *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II*, published just before his death in 1995, paints a very different picture. Smith denies that racism was behind the removal, and he points to the benefits of the experience for the Japanese-American community. Smith's work, however, while challenging, is