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Michał Mazurkiewicz (Lenkija / Polska / Poland)

Films definitely affect the way we perceive the world. In many cases, they are not an ordinary form of entertainment; they frequently shape public opinion and social values. That is why they have always been so important to the world of politics. It goes without saying that films play a particularly significant role in the stormy periods of history, undoubtedly in times of war.

Poles, watching perhaps the most famous Hollywood production action of which takes place during World War II – *Casablanca* (1942) – may be astonished that the European resistance movement is represented by a Czech [sic!]. We all know that Czechs' contribution to the war effort and their suffering at Nazi hands were incomparably less than that of Poles. Surprisingly, there are no Poles in the film. Anyone who has basic historical knowledge is aware of the unmatched achievements of the Polish underground resistance movement. Was it done by accident? Were there any similar shockingly unfair films? Unfortunately, the answer is yes.

Mieczysław B. B. Biskupski – a Polish-American historian and political scientist – examines Hollywood's highly unfavourable portrayal of Poland and Poles in American films presenting the period of World War II. He stresses that anti-Polish leftist Hollywood (mostly Jewish) filmmakers stubbornly promoted this negative image. The author aims to answer the questions: “Why was the American film industry so unfair towards Poland by ignoring, belittling, and demonizing Poland and the Poles?” and “Why was Poland contrary to countries like France, Norway or even Czechoslovakia portrayed in a negative light in numerous movies?”. In order to achieve it, the author examines the political climate that influenced Hollywood films and investigates a great number of memoirs, letters, diaries, and memoranda written by American screenwriters, directors, studio heads and actors.

The volume starts with an introduction to the Polish edition, written by an outstanding columnist Stanisław Michalkiewicz. It is original and sheds new light on what the reader will get to know in the rest of the book. It is followed by the chapter concerning the presence of Poles in the American cinema before the year 1939. The next chapter gives a description of the horrible period of 1939-45 in Poland. This is a necessary and significant part of the book worth to be recommended to people who lack historical knowledge on wartime Poland and its heroic fight both with the Germans and the Soviets. Hollywood did not seem to show much interest in dramatic history of Poland.

The rest of the book presents American war films in which negative Polish characters abound. The action of only three films [sic!] takes place in occupied Poland. Most of those films are – as the author successfully proves – full of mistakes and historical lies and manipulations, for example, the names Poles were given could not possibly be Polish. Biskupski devotes considerable attention to the details of the discussed films. He

provides some striking examples which enhance our understanding of the specificity of the American wartime cinema.

The political motivations are also discussed here. Roosevelt needed to ally with Stalin, Washington needed Moscow. The Polish question complicated American-Soviet relations and Poland became a troublesome obstacle. American audience simply had to be manipulated into embracing their new Soviet ally. In Hollywood, dominated by a leftist or even communist mentality, screenwriters did not have to be persuaded into crafting negative Polish characters in films from World War Two era. Government agencies charged with overseeing wartime films were themselves following a pro-Soviet policy and willing to overlook negative portrayals of Poles.

To sum up, Biskupski's book is an interesting contribution to the field of film studies in America and Poland. It is a real eye-opener. The research is meticulous. It is exhaustive in its study of the Hollywood films and serials. It is, however, of great interest not only for historians of American or Polish cinema. The author's style is straightforward, it is well read, and I would strongly recommend it to the readers. The book was first published by the University of Kentucky Press in the USA and can be also read in English.