

The Portrayal of the Nazis in *Raiders of the Lost Ark.*

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1 The History of the Film.

While works of non-fiction exist in abundance involving the Nazis. Sometimes, fictional works give a better idea of how the world views a historical event. According to Lucas Films, in 1973, George Lucas created the idea for a homage to the 1930s Adventure serials. He created the Indiana Jones character more out of nostalgia to his boyhood than anything else. However, due to the development of *Star Wars*, Lucas placed his new character on the back-burner. After the first *Star Wars* film became a huge success in 1977, Lucas heard that friend and fellow director, Steven Spielberg wanted to make a James Bond film, but had been denied this privilege because he was not an American. Lucas then told Spielberg about the rough outline for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Spielberg was more than enthusiastic. Due to previous commitments, the Script did not reach its first draft until late in 1978 the script was not finalised until Late in 1979. Even then, only by the personal desire of Lucas and Spielberg was the movie made. The movie company did not believe that this kind of film would work in the culture of the late 70s and early 80s. Only the previous success of the Lucas and Spielberg films convinced the executives to make the film with the condition of a limited budget and a highly compressed film time to only 73 days. The movie was filmed in 1980 and was finally released in 1981. The movie has three major groups of people. The Americans, as represented by Indian Jones and Marion Ravenwood; the Nazis, including a French collaborator name Belloq, and a sadistic Nazi agent named Toht; and a slew of ignorant native populations whether they are Arabs, Indian tribes in the Amazon, or the Tibetans. While the main

character, Indiana Jones, is a compelling character that draws the audience in, the movie also has an entire set of personalities for various villains.

2 Belloq.

The first villain is introduced in the opening scenes of the movie. He is the antithesis of Indiana Jones, the French archaeologist Belloq. Belloq is shown as a less physical, but more cunning version of Indiana Jones. While Jones is a rough-hewn adventurer, Belloq uses the might of others which he manipulates using his cunning and intelligence. However, this does not mean Jones is an anti-intellectual hero, Jones is witty and clever in his own right, but he is a mixture of both intelligentsia and proletarian. The next time Belloq and Jones meet, Belloq has now been employed by the Nazis to uncover the Ark of the Covenant which becomes is the symbol of divine power and right to both the Nazis and the Americans. Belloq continues to show he is the refined civilised Frenchman, which Indiana shows he is not only able to equal, but go beyond this. Additionally, Belloq is a purely non-methodical character, while Indiana depends on both the non-methodical adventuring as well as traditionally archaeological techniques. Belloq's defining characteristic is personal greed. He sees the entire Nazi apparatus as his pawn. In the end his own greed destroys him and his Nazi partners. In fact, he is the channel through which the power of God leaves the Ark and goes out to destroy the villains in one clean, yet horrendous stroke.

3 Toht and the Nazis.

The second villain to be introduced is a shadowy Nazi agent named Toht. He is the face of sadism in the Nazi regime. He finds pleasure in harm coming to anyone. He displays this pleasure with psychotic laughter. Although, he displays himself as a tough individual, his true side is a coward. He always depends on henchman to do his dirty work. His henchmen hold Marion down as he prepare to torture her with a hot poker. When the poker is whipped out of his hand, instead of immediately drawing his pistol, he takes cover and only after a few minutes does he draw his gun. However he never even fires it. After he burns his hand in the bar scene in Tibet, he responds in a very childlike manner: he gives a womanly scream and runs out of the burning

bar. The message is that while this sadistic villain may seem tougher than Jones, he is really just a child. Meanwhile, Jones shows he is tough even in the face of pain and danger.

Later on more Nazis are introduced, however none have the character that Toht has. One peculiar point is noted in the dialog never are the Nazis referred to as Germans, their German origin even is treated as merely coincidental as Arabs, a Frenchman, and Tibetans are shown as part of the machine. The German Nazis are portrayed as if they were physical extensions of Hitler and not individuals. They are shown as the non-intellectual, they do not think, they only perform orders from their Fuhrer. Additionally, they are shown doing all their tasks without cunning and as a brute force mechanism. Belloq even compares the actions of the Nazis to a bulldozer. The dehumanisation of the Nazis is further shown when at the Tanis dig they show a group of soldiers eating their lunch in a manner that resembles pigs eating at a trough. Throughout the movie the Germans are shown as methodically clockwork machines that despite their advantages are continual are outsmarted by Indiana Jones. Jones even manages to sneak aboard a U-Boat across the Mediterranean and then sneak around a secret Nazi base. When he is found, the Nazi who discovers Jones assumes him to be a delinquent and sloppy soldier who he then berates until Jones knocks him unconscious.

4 Heresy, Punishment, and Redemption.

Near the end of the film, Belloq's personal greed manipulates his religious principles into his belief that he can speak to God and bring his desires to him through the Ark. He then manipulates the machines by evoking the name of Hitler which causes the Nazi machine to spark to life and prepare a Hebrew ritual to open the Ark. The only concern the Nazis have is that the ceremony is Jewish in nature. Throughout the movie, Indiana is the atheistic cosmopolitan westerner who denies that there are spiritual powers. Meanwhile the Nazis treat the occult and spiritualism as a tool that can be harnessed by science and bent to their humanistic will. To Indiana Jones, God does not exist, while to the Nazis, God can be controlled and used as a part of the machine. The moment of epiphany hits Jones as the Nazis open the Ark. Jones finds God and declares to Marion that they should avert their eyes from the Ark. The newly pious Jones is spared. Meanwhile the Nazis,

only find dust inside the Ark. The Nazis then lose their twisted faith and revert to an atheistic state that is unlike Jones' former atheism and is more of atheism through spite at God. This reversal at the final moment is what matters, as the power of God suddenly emerges in the form of spirits. While these spirits scare the Nazis, they do not kill them. The resulting power of God which consumes Belloq, the Nazi commandant, and Toht in a purifying fire, is then channelled out to the attending Nazis and who are then pulled in to the Ark which then re-seals itself. Indiana and Marion are thus saved by their newly found faith that leaves them unscratched despite the fact that their ties have been burned off.

5 Spiritualism and Americanism.

The movie's central themes are not one concerning the reality of the early part of the Nazi era. They are more centralised to the themes of the end of the death-throws of the Hippy movement and the birth of New Age Spiritualism. An average American, Indiana Jones, who goes on extraordinary adventures in the name of science learns that in a scientific world spiritualism still exists. The Nazis however are the image of dehumanisation that is mirrored in the stiff rigidness of the corporate world. Additionally the script was written during a economically unstable era, about another unstable time, the Great Depression. Likewise, just as Depression-era serials were about escaping the suffering of daily life, this film gives the same devices to a repression stricken people. However, the image given of the 1930s is not one of depression, but of adventure and a world where there are still unknowns. The movie also has major portions in areas of great significance to that time. The New Age movement combined elements of Buddhism and the Ancient Egyptians with traditionally Christianity. As a result, you have a Judeo-Christian relic being sought after in a lost Egyptian city. Additionally, the first piece of the puzzle is in a center of Buddhism, Tibet. During the 1970s, the first activism of the 1959 annexation of Tibet by China began. Also in 1976, environmentalist had the first stand-off over logging the Amazon. All this adds up to a movie on how New Age Spiritualism can help a typical American who is both intelligent and strong over come the overwhelming odds that a mechanical system that is trying to reshape the world into their own image. In the light of the post-Vietnam protest culture, this is a battle of the American people versus either large corporations, a machine-like government bureaucracy, or the shadow of

Soviet totalitarianism. This makes *Raiders of the Lost Ark* a movie more about how man through spiritualism can overcome oppressive mechanical forces. This appeals to the aging hippies, New Age spiritualists, and red-blooded Americans against whichever villain they wish to superimpose over the Nazis.