



PROJECT MUSE®

Film and Genocide

Kristi M. Wilson, Tomás F. Crowder-Taraborrelli

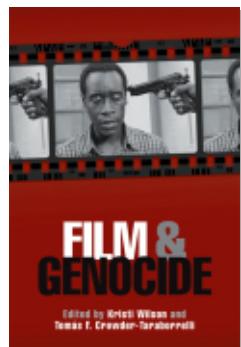
Published by University of Wisconsin Press

Wilson, M. & Crowder-Taraborrelli, F..

Film and Genocide.

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/18964>

GIs Documenting Genocide

*Amateur Films of World War II
Concentration Camps*

M A R S H A O R G E R O N

It is clear that the time is upon us for the screen to be intently utilized in bringing home to all people a comprehension of the scope of Nazi crimes . . . And the public—or that element of it which might feel its sensibilities abused—must realize that informational pictures, no matter how shocking, are for the general good. . . . The suffering of others must be felt by all of us in some sense if we are to have a comprehension of what has happened in the world in these black years.

BOSLEY CROWTHER, "The Solemn Facts"

I saw and photographed the piles of naked, lifeless bodies, the human skeletons in furnaces, the living skeletons who would die the next day because they had had to wait too long for deliverance. . . . Using the camera was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me.

MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE, *Portrait of Myself*

I want to use these ideas—one voiced by a popular movie critic writing from the American home front in the spring of

1945, the other by a photographer writing retrospectively (in 1963) about her first-hand experiences of the Nazi concentration camps—as a jumping-off point and a frame for this exploration of the all-but-forgotten amateur cinematographic record of concentration camps at the close of World War II. Crowther advocates for using cinematic evidence of the camps as part of a public mission of education and empathy building. This philosophy regards seeing as the first step to believing the unfathomable. Although “comprehending” may be a bit of an overstatement, the sense that “the public,” as Crowther puts it, needed to be exposed to visual evidence of Nazi atrocities was widespread, if equally controversial.¹ Bourke-White, one of the first photographers to document postliberation Buchenwald, speaks from the other side of the camera, articulating the power of the photographic instrument precisely as a means—and perhaps a justification—of psychological distance between the photographer and her horrific subjects. Images of the camps raised—and still raise—the most serious of ethical questions, which were and are confronted by an array of spectators, each with vastly different stakes, at their respective moments of confrontation with these images.

The concentration camps were, almost immediately following their liberation, treated as memorials and as educational displays. American soldiers, the international media, and the local citizenry were encouraged to tour the camps, and German prisoners of war (POWs) were ordered to witness the genocidal traces that remained within camp gates. The 16mm footage shot by Dick Ham at Buchenwald in April 1945 for broadcaster Lowell Thomas (the footage was never used), for example, depicts the postliberation camp already endowed with museum-like qualities.² Makeshift exhibits representing Nazi crimes against humanity were on display as part of the emerging project of documenting the genocidal acts that transpired at the camp prior to liberation, with survivors on hand, in this case, as witnesses testifying to their experiences. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who visited Ohrdruf (a Buchenwald subcamp) on April 12, 1945, strongly encouraged Allied troops to see for themselves the conditions at these newly liberated camps, while Army Signal Corps and journalistic photographers were called in on an explicitly evidentiary mission to shoot both still and moving images.³ As Jeffrey Shandler argues, Eisenhower “was at the forefront of establishing the act of witnessing the conditions of recently liberated camps as a morally transformative experience.”⁴ Seeing the camps in person was, according to this logic, ideal; but seeing representations—photographs and films—was an acceptable alternative. This culture of documentation and witnessing was being established in official capacities and policies, but soldiers who entered the camps often created more personal records of what they encountered.

There exists an extensive literature on the official photographic and moving image record of the camps at the close of the war. The unofficial, amateur movie

footage shot by enlisted men has been virtually ignored. As Susan Carruthers has put it, “The visual register of genocide continues to be shaped by footage shot by the U.S. Army Signal Corps and Soviet camera crews on entering the camps in 1945.”⁵ Indeed, our cultural memory of the Holocaust and especially of the concentration camps as the most concrete manifestation of the Nazi’s plans for European Jews consists almost entirely of official still and moving images, military as well as journalistic. Both Barbie Zelizer and Janina Struk, in their respective books about photographing and filming the Holocaust, discuss amateur *still* photography—which was widespread at the close of the European segment of the war. However, they entirely ignore the subject of amateur films.⁶

This conspicuous critical neglect is, no doubt, partly due to the difficulty researchers have had in trying to access such films, at least until recently. As 8mm and 16mm collections continue to enter archives, and—equally importantly—as archives recognize the historical value of amateur cinematography and of providing access to these collections, historians and scholars are offered an opportunity to think about new perspectives on the concentration camps as the most coherent symbol of genocide at the close of the war. These films offer us a glimpse into the close of the European segment of the war through the eyes of the soldiers who felt compelled to capture some aspect of it on motion picture film. Their cinematic records are an important alternative source of knowledge about the camps and can be considered a unique type of home movie as well as a horrific visual souvenir of the war.⁷

Home Movies at War

Despite rules against enlisted men shooting personal films during the war, small gauge filmmakers did not all abandon their cinematographic hobbies during World War II. Some were called on to work for the official documentary units of the Signal Corps, during which time they also managed to shoot footage for their personal collections (George Stevens is a well-known example of this). Still others managed to bring with them or to procure 8mm and 16mm cameras while overseas. Much of the amateur footage taken of the camps at the close of the war has been kept in private hands, shown, if at all, to family and friends. In recent years, however, these films have begun to make their way into archives such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the Library of Congress (LOC), the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), and Emory University. Collecting institutions have begun the diligent work of preserving and making access copies of these materials, which cannot readily be shown to researchers

in their original 8mm and 16mm formats. Some archives have made these films even more widely accessible, not only to scholars but also to the general public, by putting them online. The USHMM has been most active in facilitating access to the moving image holdings in their Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, and visitors to their website can search their easily navigable database using such terms as “concentration camps,” “liberation,” or “Dachau.”⁸

Almost all the amateur film that I have encountered from World War II depicts innocuous images of “downtime”: shots of clowning around, smoking, and reading, the local landscape and citizenry. Most of this footage was shot by men in the army while they were in Europe. Retired Major Norman Hatch, who was on active duty as a cameraman for the U.S. Marine Corps from 1941 to 1946, explained that marines would have had been hard pressed to shoot their own movies during World War II, likely more so than men in the army or air force.⁹ Because of the close quarters kept by marines onboard a ship, hobbyist activities such as filming would likely not have taken place without catching the eye of a ship’s skipper, who could confiscate and, if necessary, destroy any unofficial photographic equipment. Soldiers in the army appear to have had different cinematographic fortunes, despite the fact that amateur filming overseas was officially restricted for very logical reasons: the film an enlisted man might shoot could reveal secrets, positions, and so on if captured by the enemy. As retired cameraman Hatch clarified, “You’re on duty 24-7; you’re never a civilian part time, especially during a war.”¹⁰ Despite this, I have tracked down dozens of 8mm and 16mm amateur films shot by soldiers of the camps following their liberation. I am certain that there are other such films to be found in archives, libraries, and historical societies, much as I am sure that similar films exist in private hands as well as in many a landfill.

In October 1944, *Home Movies* magazine published an article by Private First Class Gene Fernette titled “G.I. Movie Makers.” It begins: “Not every G.I. Joe succumbed to the feverish impulse to dispose of his worldly goods, including his cine equipment, immediately after receiving that special ‘greeting’ from Uncle Sam. Many brought their cameras along with them to training camp and found opportunity to carry on with their hobby of making movies. . . . Of course, not every cinefilming G.I. found taking his camera along easy. Certain branches of the services made this impractical or impossible.”¹¹ Despite the range of prohibitions against filming that existed in all of the military branches, Fernette acknowledges that “many have been fortunate to have cine cameras along with them overseas and have succeeded in obtaining some rare pictures in spite of the dearth of film, most of which must be supplied to them from here.”¹² In J. H. Schoen’s February 1945 *Home Movies* article about the Army Signal Corps, cameraman Corporal Roy



Advertisement for the Universal Camera Corporation. *Home Movies* magazine, March 1944.

Creveling openly discusses “making his own 16mm. movies at every opportunity” when he was not shooting official footage.¹³ Although “Combat Cameraman’s Communiqué . . .” is ostensibly about the ways that amateur cinematographers were trained by and integrated into the Army Signal Corps, it is notable that Creveling’s hobbyist pursuits are discussed so openly. Personal moviemaking during the war was clearly no secret.

The stateside amateur cinematography trade press took for granted that this kind of filming was taking place during the war, as even an ongoing Universal Camera Corporation campaign made clear. In Universal Camera’s March 1944 *Home Movies* advertisement, a GI writes a letter home to accompany the film footage

he's shot, which he hopes his family will get a "kick out of."¹⁴ Although his is not European front footage, nor is it imagery that resonates with the idea of war in any way, the advertisement anticipates a continuity of amateur cinematography once the soldier returns home and has more conventional "home movies" to make. It also acknowledges that at least some soldiers were making movies overseas and shipping their film back home for domestic consumption, which appears to have been the most practical method of getting film developed. The fact that a major American magazine promoting home moviemaking frequently represented and discussed the enlisted amateur cinematographer supports considering not only how these films might be understood as a unique kind of home movie but also how they might test the limits of this conceptualization.

Home movies are traditionally associated with leisure, pleasure, and family, taking birthdays, holidays, and other aspects of domestic life as their most frequently recurring subjects. But they also often depict travel (both for work and for recreation), foreign people, and places, filmed primarily with home exhibition in mind. The specific films under discussion here by and large represent traumatic images, but they are still personal mementos and were, based on surviving oral histories, used almost exclusively in home-viewing contexts. Struk has observed that American soldiers, who were encouraged to make still photographs of the atrocities they discovered at the camps, often "kept their photographs hidden" instead of sharing them on their return.¹⁵ Amateur films of the war, then, might be conceived of as the rarest kinds of home movies inasmuch as they typically depict obviously unpleasant but, perhaps, equally necessary memories. They are also uniquely authored films, tied to specific individuals who both shot the footage and, in many cases, thanks in part to the hard work of the collecting institutions themselves, narrate the images in recorded interviews conducted at the time the materials were deposited.¹⁶

"I Wish All the People Back Home Could Walk through This Place"

I want to begin my exploration of a sampling of these GI movies with Joseph Bernard Kushlis's 8mm film of Ohrdruf, shot at the same Buchenwald subcamp that inspired Eisenhower's commands to witness and record. Kushlis's film is part of the Fred R. Crawford Witness to the Holocaust Project at Emory University and is available online.¹⁷ In a 1979 oral history, Kushlis reports being at the camp April 12 and 13, the same time as Generals Bradley, Patton, and Eisenhower's well-known visit, during which time Ohrdruf became a kind of ground zero for the call to document and report the atrocities encountered by the liberators.¹⁸

Kushlis, a sergeant in the Third Army at the time, described arriving and filming at Ohrdruf:

I went over there promptly with several of my buddies and I had a small 8mm movie camera with me, which I was permitted to take with me since I had joined the outfit late in the game as a replacement. Of course, cameras earlier in the war were banned—the use of them was banned at least by the average enlisted personnel. But, I had my camera with me and I have taken these pictures of Ohrdruf—the very emaciated, starved—obviously starved—bodies lying around, most of them shot through the forehead as the Germans retreated and left them. . . . While I was there filming our officers in charge, of course, had already started civilians, picked up on the downtown streets and brought to the Camp, to perform the burial of these bodies. . . . And to bury such a large number at one time—of course, coffins were not available. . . . So, as near as I could make out, they were all being put in linen bags. My movies do show these German civilians digging the long trenches for common graves into which these bodies were then put.¹⁹

Kushlis's retrospective memory of his footage reminds us of the complexities not only of witnessing but also of capturing these images as a personal record of the genocidal acts that transpired in the camps. Kushlis clearly uses his own film as a conduit to memory—he says “my movies do show” instead of “I remember”—indicating the importance and the limitations of such records. By this I mean to suggest both that the images contained in such films offer a certain portrait of the treatment of those interred in the camps, and that they provide only a partial glimpse of what was witnessed, requiring personal memory and narration to offer even the most rudimentary explanation of what they depict. Clearly the film functions partly as a companion to his memory of the camp; the two might even be considered indistinguishable.

In his footage, Kushlis employs a marked aesthetic sensibility: he appears to be especially interested in making portraits of the dead, focusing on a single body or two in a fashion that tends to them as individuals instead of just shooting scenes of mass death.²⁰ His film depicts a series of close-up portraits followed by wider shots that convey the scale of death at the camp, alternating between more intimate images and what we might call establishing shots. As Carol Zemel has demonstrated in her discussion of Holocaust liberation photographs, military film most “often took a longer or broader view, showing camp grounds strewn with bodies as liberating armies discharged their work.”²¹ Kushlis’s brief record suggests an interest in individually recognizing the dead, however incomplete (for practical reasons) this representational schema is. From all appearances Kushlis filmed on his own

accord, and his images suggest a desire to acknowledge the individual, human consequences of genocide as well as its scale at this camp.

It is also worth noting that Kushlis does not photograph any survivors. In his oral history, Kushlis specifically addresses the ethics of his decision to film what he encountered in the camp: “I viewed the scene in utter disbelief. It did occur to me that there was probably a question of morality or decency in even photographing these unfortunate people, but I quickly resolved the question to my own satisfaction in realizing that here was history that should be recorded.”²² Perhaps this explains his decision not to train his lens on the living?

Although we can only speculate about his representational decisions, similar versions of this justification for filming recur in oral histories of other GIs who filmed the camps. Interviewees repeatedly narrate a transition from incredulity and traumatization to a sense of historical motivation to capture these images, however obscene. As Patricia Zimmermann writes in her introduction to *Mining the Home Movie*, “Amateur films and home movies negotiate between private memories and social histories. . . . Consonant with explanatory models of history from below, the history of amateur film discourses and visual practices are always situated in context with . . . more visible forms of cultural practices.”²³ Zimmermann’s ideas are especially relevant to understanding this unusual kind of home movie as a private version of the official and widely circulating documentation provided by the military and journalistic sources. These films exist at the shadowy interstices of personal memory and official history, and recuperating them from obscurity is the first step in moving them out of the merely personal realm.

The compulsion to capture such traumatic images—things that should be remembered even if they are not desired or fond memories—reminds us of Bourke-White’s explanation of the role the camera played in her ability to witness the scenes at Buchenwald. As she elaborated, “I have to work with a veil over my mind. In photographing the murder camps, the protective veil was so tightly drawn that I hardly knew what I had taken until I saw prints of my own photographs. It was as though I was seeing those horrors for the first time.”²⁴ The distancing effect Bourke-White refers to, a kind of dissociation from the present and a return to it at the moment of witnessing images instead of reality, returns us to the idea of motivation for the enlisted cinematographers under discussion here. Where Bourke-White was doing her job by photographing the camps, we might ask what motivated these soldiers to record history, especially when that history would not be seen by others.

Unlike many other amateur cinematographers who filmed scenes at the camps, Kushlis did not keep these movies to himself. He sent his exposed reels

back to the United States to be processed and did not view the footage until he returned home to edit it.²⁵ After the war ended, he was invited to clubs, such as the YMCA, and to other groups where he would show his movies as often as three times a week. Barbie Zelizer has discussed the experiential power of journalistic representations of the camps: “One did not need to be at the camps; the power of the image made everyone who saw the photos into a witness.”²⁶ Kushlis narrates a similar trust in photographic/cinematic veracity when he explains that audiences who saw his films felt convinced of German atrocities for particular reasons: “They were all interested in seeing firsthand what they had read about. . . . Here was something taken by a strict amateur photographer in which there could be no doctoring of scenes and no faking of film. What I took was there. It was fact.”²⁷

While the fundamental spirit of Zelizer’s and Kushlis’s assertions is difficult to argue against, their faith in photographic indexicality and their notion that the viewing of what for them are indisputable images amounted to a sort of firsthand experience is problematic. In this case, Kushlis is—like the government—using moving images as proof of what happened in the camps, so his film might be considered as functioning along the same lines as official footage. But the perception of the amateur as functioning autonomously—we might even say outside of ideology—seems to append a magical quality of truth that is also tied to the maker’s own firsthand witnessing, his own status as rememberer. Both film and memory, however, are subject to questioning. As documentarian Errol Morris has put it, “The brain is not a Reality-Recorder.”²⁸ And while film can record the real, it too is subject to any number of (mis)interpretations or (mis)understandings.

This is not, in any way, intended as a questioning of Kushlis’s film. Rather, Kushlis’s framing here reminds us of the important perception of the amateur cinematographer’s implicit relationship to the idea of truth. Indeed, there was a considerable degree of skepticism in the spring of 1945 regarding the reality of the images circulating in newsreels and journalistic photography; many thought that such atrocities were beyond belief. The value of Kushlis’s footage resided, in part, in the fact that it was not official and therefore presumably not politically motivated or manipulated. His images were taken as “fact” not only because what they captured was, as he explains it, “there,” but also because he acted as a personal eyewitness and narrator when he screened the film. This was also the case with official documentary footage, as Carruthers has explained: “Commentary accompanying both still and moving images needed to acknowledge possible doubts in order to refute them, a task often assigned to the figure of the formerly-cynical GI, a prominent protagonist in documentary, newsreel and press accounts of the camps’ liberation.”²⁹ Of course, the scale of newsreel or documentary distribution with prerecorded narration cannot compare to one man showing his home movies to a

community group and answering their questions in person. But the intention—the function of the film and person as witness—is difficult to differentiate between. Kushlis's decision to share his films in this public fashion suggests that his "historical" motivation at the moment of filming evolved into a need to disseminate these images, presumably in an attempt to widen—a few audience members at a time—the net of virtual eyewitnesses.

The films of Colonel Alexander Zabin are deposited at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and are available online, including a reel depicting scenes at postliberation Dachau.³⁰ A doctor with General Patton's Third Army and the Fourth Auxiliary Surgical Group, Zabin landed on Normandy Beach on June 7, 1944, the day after D-Day, later treated survivors at Dachau, and managed to shoot *several hours* of 16mm footage over the course of the war, in black and white as well as in color. According to a conversation with his son, Steve Zabin, the colonel had no experience making movies prior to the war, so this was not a case of the prewar hobbyist clinging to peacetime pursuits. Steve Zabin believes that his father sent the exposed film home to his family to have it developed stateside. It is quite possible that the 16mm camera he filmed with was procured in Europe; Zabin, in fact, returned home with many souvenirs of the war, including a yellow cloth star (presumably from Dachau) and thirty reels of German-made films that he found in a warehouse (including footage of Hitler).³¹

In spite of his inexperience, Zabin shot truly extraordinary films. According to his son, the colonel would often show these films to his immediate family, his kids, and other relatives after the war, but he did not show the Dachau footage to his friends or anyone else. Steve Zabin remembers that his father would not talk much about the Dachau footage when he did show it to his family beyond saying, in a rather unemotional way (think of Bourke-White's articulation of her emotional distancing), that it was horrendous and that his encounters at the camp justified the whole war. Zabin's own notes (contained in the original film can) indicate that the footage on the Dachau reel is "well spliced." This is somewhat unusual for the films I have encountered, most of which were edited in camera. An inspection of Zabin's film by archivist Lindsay Zarwell at USHMM reveals that the Dachau footage is spliced together in ten different places from at least two reels (one black and white, and one Kodachrome color). It would be fascinating to know if any footage taken by Zabin at Dachau was excluded from the finished reel, but we have no record of Zabin's methods of filming or editing.

Zabin's images of Dachau are careful, providing a brief but comprehensive portrait of the camp as he encountered it. The Dachau sequence begins with shots of the gas chambers (with some American soldiers occasionally in the frame), including a bathhouse label over a door, followed by images of stacked wooden

coffins. These shots of inanimate camp details set the stage for what follows, but not in a fashion that prepares the viewer for what is to come. Zabin cuts to a series of shots depicting stacks of emaciated corpses, dead bodies intertwined in various stages of dress. These images are shocking for their graphic and uncensored representation. Although they logically follow from what precedes them, the move from inanimate buildings and structures to inanimate human beings in such an inhumane state is jarring. This is, however, Zabin's cinematic story of Dachau, and the shots of buildings and coffins ground the viewer in the structural realities of the camp prior to introducing the degraded human element.

From the inanimate and the dead, Zabin next includes several underexposed interior shots of the bunkers occupied by surviving prisoners, and then cuts to a sick ward where injured patients stare into the camera as it pans across them. The next cut ventures outside to a group of liberated men wearing striped uniforms. Zabin pans left and then right across the group as they listen to instructions; they, too, directly stare into the camera with blank expressions on their faces. A quick shot of a dead body in the water (perhaps a German soldier, but it is hard to tell) is followed by a series of shots taken outside the camp's gates, including a number of clothed, dead bodies. Zabin alternates between scenes of the prisoners and wider shots of the camp, including some striking high-angle shots that give a sense of the camp's geography and size. The final Dachau images are of a train, presumably at the camp station, where a series of shots reveal dead bodies on a number of the cars. The film then moves on to images of U.S. soldiers at roll call in a field and then, most jarringly, to colorful images of a young girl at a Czech folk festival. The film, much like Zabin's life, goes on.

A month after the liberation of Dachau, Zabin wrote a letter to his hometown newspaper, the *Malverne Herald*. In this letter dated May 31, 1945, he narrates visiting the camp in a fashion that resonates with the many other descriptions that issued from soldiers who entered the camps around the same time, lingering on the sensory shock and indelibility of the experience. Zabin wrote, "I can still smell the stench of the dead, decayed and burned flesh, and the horrible sights will never leave my memory. I think you know me well enough to believe what I say is nothing but the cold, ugly truth, untainted by personal feeling. I had never before been able to believe all the atrocity stories and evil deeds attributed to the Germans." Directly countering the claims that were circulating regarding the impossibility of what was being reported about the camps, Zabin goes on to describe the conditions of slave labor he witnessed, the gas chambers at Dachau, the crematoria, the prisoner barracks, and the stacks of dead bodies. Zabin concludes his letter: "Men broken in body and mind were walking skeletons, red-eyed and bewildered, with empty, helpless expressions. It is all a horrible memory, a nightmare I can never hope to

forget. I wish that all the people back home could walk through this place. Then they would realize that any sacrifice they have made—even the loss of their loved ones—was not made in vain. To liberate this camp alone was sufficient reason for our war with Germany.”

It is worth considering this letter as a virtual narration of Zabin’s footage and of the process of conveying the factuality of the camps to civilians back home, another version of what Kushlis does with his cinematic lectures. It is, in some ways, a brief but explicit “walk through this place” as well as a reminder of how difficult it would have been to possess such devastating images, perhaps especially given Zabin’s decision *not* to share them with anyone beyond his inner circle. The indelible nature of what he saw was ensured by his possession of movies that documented his experiences at Dachau and that could function as containers, or sorts, for those “horrible sights.” Writing a letter narrating the horrors of the camps is one thing; sharing such explicit and painful images is clearly another.

Documenting Genocide?

As Struk, Shandler, and Zelizer all affirm in their respective research on liberation photographs, American soldiers were encouraged to shoot their own 35mm photographs of the postliberation concentration camps in part to support official reports and allay suspicions that things could not be as bad as they seemed. Amateur cinematographers no doubt were allowed—and on occasion were encouraged—to make movies of the camps for the same reason. While this chapter is framed in the context of “GIs documenting genocide,” it is necessary to pause here to reflect on the fact that none of the amateur or official images can live up to that ambitious concept. Although each reel of film captures hints of what transpired in the camps, the films are more opaque than they are revelatory, more reliant on human memory (itself spotty and interestingly reliant on the photographic) than on the sheer explanatory abilities of their own images, and they are always representations of acts that transpired in the past. As many have argued, there is no adequate way to depict what actually happened in any of the camps under discussion in this chapter. I do not believe that this is just a function of the scale and degree of trauma associated with the Holocaust (although this certainly presents representational challenges of its own), but is rather inherent in the nature of documentary images, which are also subjective and partial. What these amateur cinematographers offer, however, is intriguing and valuable precisely because it is so clearly subjective and partial. Each one, in their own way, captures a “walk through” the camp at a particular moment in its postliberation lifeline. These amateur cinematographers’ choices—to film the dead, to film the living, not to

film the dead, not to film the living—remind us of the deeply personal nature of these men's experiences and of their decisions about what to remember, and what, perhaps, to try to forget. They are also a concrete indicator of the intimate relationship between memory and photography.

In conclusion, I want to consider two differently authored films that occupy divergent ends of the representational spectrum. William Fedeli, who eventually became a lieutenant colonel but was a supply officer with the Quartermaster group when he first went overseas, shot fourteen reels of 8mm footage, mostly in color, which now reside at the Library of Congress. As he reported in an oral history, he started shooting movies while training in Iowa and brought his camera with him overseas, where he reported having it with him all the time. At the end of the war he was in Weimar and made his way to Buchenwald after it was liberated. The notes on this canister of film, which is not available online, read: “1945: Concentration camp in Nordhausen Germany, Ike, Frankfurt, Air trip to England, Cambridge.” Fedeli’s footage depicts Nordhausen (originally a subcamp of Buchenwald that eventually became a camp with subcamps of its own), which was largely devoted to producing weapons, hence the military detritus seen throughout the footage.³²

As Fedeli reported in his oral history, “What I saw is what everybody knows; I saw some of the bones that were baked into the oven. I didn’t see them being gassed or anything, but I saw how they lived in these bunks four high and so on . . . walking bones.” Fedeli narrates his memories of what he witnessed at the camps in a fashion that evokes precisely the kinds of images we see in both Kushlis’s and Zabin’s footage. His description evokes what have become the iconographic images of the Holocaust: the bones, the ovens, the living skeletons. But Fedeli’s footage is notable because it does *not* show us these instantly recognizable, graphic images of deprivation and death that we are accustomed to—and expect—in liberation footage, amateur or otherwise, and which Fedeli claims to have witnessed firsthand. Whether this was an intentional avoidance on Fedeli’s part or it reflects the reality of the day on which he shot the film is unknowable, as this is not a subject broached in his oral history. It is worth noting that Fedeli also includes what he *did not see* in his oral history by invoking the genocidal tool of the gas chambers as part of his experience of the camp. While acknowledging that he did not see the gassing for himself, Fedeli witnessed the traces of that process; his knowledge of what happened in the camp clearly went well beyond the parameters of what he witnessed at the specific moment he arrived.

When asked about the pragmatics of shooting during the war, Fedeli reported: “I wasn’t supposed to do that but they never said anything to me.” Despite prohibitions about filming, Fedeli shot, suggesting a personal motivation that outweighed the risk of potential disciplinary action. But we are left wondering, then, why

Fedeli might have excluded the sights that so traumatized and motivated other amateur cinematographers. In his films, we may be witnessing a version of selective memory enacted on 8mm, something much more in line with our traditional conceptualization of appropriate home movie content. Fedeli may also have censored his own final product, editing out footage that he considered too traumatic or graphic. The footage might also have been underexposed or even lost. Whatever the reason, his film is striking because of what it does not represent.

We encounter the opposite kind of representation in future Hollywood filmmaker Sam Fuller's concentration camp footage. At the close of the war, Fuller was with the First Infantry Division as they liberated Falkenau concentration camp in the former Czechoslovakia. At the request of his commanding officer, Fuller shot his footage with a 16mm Bell & Howell camera his mother sent him while he was overseas. Like many other GIs, it is likely that Fuller sent his exposed film home to be developed; a note to his brother, while likely not the one accompanying this particular footage, indicates that sending film home was part of Fuller's routine.³³ I have written extensively about the Falkenau footage and Fuller's Hollywood World War II films elsewhere, but in the larger context of this discussion there are a few things that make Fuller's film unique and an exemplary instance of a GI attempting to document what happened in the camps.³⁴ First, Fuller's is the only amateur footage of the camps that I have encountered that is so extensively and carefully edited, and so long in duration that it might reasonably be understood as a narrative film, as opposed to a home movie. The Falkenau footage has about seventy splices in it, almost certainly done after Fuller returned stateside, and runs roughly twenty-two minutes in length, far exceeding any of the other footage under discussion in this chapter.

Fuller later returned to the site of Falkenau camp with documentarian Emil Weiss, whose film *Falkenau, the Impossible* (released in 1988 in France) includes footage of Fuller narrating the film he shot in 1945, which he called "his first movie."³⁵ Fuller's Falkenau footage shows the removal of dead bodies from a shed; the dressing of corpses by local townspeople; close-ups of the corpses that testify to the abuses they endured; shots of survivors observing the scene; and an extended burial ritual that included parading the dead bodies through town, pushed by the townspeople who denied any knowledge of what had transpired in the camps. Where Fedeli's footage might be viewed without being sure that it was shot in a concentration camp, there is no mistaking what Fuller's camera is witnessing.

Historian Sybil Milton has criticized the use of still photographs documenting the Holocaust without identifying "the origin or purpose of the photograph; whether the photographer was Nazi or Jewish; and whether the image was exploitative, reportorial, or memorial in nature."³⁶ We know that the films under discussion in

this chapter were made by liberators, and that what these men filmed was not intended for or used in any official capacity. These are imagistic souvenirs, memorials of the dead and dying, potential antidotes to disbelief, and supplements to the fragility of both human memory and comprehension. This overview of amateur film records of the camps begins to explore what Patricia Zimmermann describes as “the practical problematic of home movies as artifacts that require mining, excavation, exhumation, reprocessing and reconsideration . . . moving them out of the realm of inert evidence into a more dynamic relationship to provide historical explanation.”³⁷

Increasing availability of these films in archives and online begins to move these private renderings of the camps into the public sphere. These images can only, as Zimmerman implies, “provide historical explanation” with diligent contextual and historical work, which has only just begun in this chapter. These are not counternarratives to the official records of the camps, but rather supplemental portraits inspired by the very human urge to document. They do not depict genocide per se, but they capture what remained of and in the camps at a crucial moment in their history. Unlike the official records of the camps, which were explicitly evidentiary in nature, these films are striking as equally experiential: their makers were documenting what they saw, but also their own experience with the war and its aftermath. Bourke-White may have used her camera to justify looking at the unbearable sights she encountered, but these men were not explicitly doing their jobs by filming images of the camps. Their films are more than just “informational pictures,” to return to Crowther’s terminology with which this chapter began, although they are that as well. They are also home movies that affirm the role these men played as “eyewitness to that great agony,” to borrow words from then-amateur cinematographer Sam Fuller.³⁸ Indeed, I think it is fair to say that these men were, in some ways, validating their own work as soldiers or doctors or quartermasters, making films that proved, at least to them, the justifiable nature of the war as a whole.

N O T E S

I am grateful for a North Carolina State University College of Humanities and Social Sciences Scholarly Project Award, which facilitated the archival research for this project. A version of this chapter was presented as “Orphans of the War: Amateur Films of Concentration Camps” at the Sixth Orphan Film Symposium at New York University, March 26–29, 2008. I would like to acknowledge the generous archival assistance I received on this project, especially from Lindsay Zarwell and Bruce Levy at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Rosemary Hanes, Mike Mashon, and Alexa Potter at the Library of Congress;

Snowden Becker at the Academy of Motion Pictures; and Nancy Watkins at Emory University. Norm Hatch, Polly Petit, and Steve Zabin all took the time to discuss aspects of this research with me, and my thinking on this subject has been greatly enriched through my conversations with them.

1. For more on the use of film as evidence of Nazi atrocities, see Caven, "Horror in Our Time"; Douglas, "Film as Witness"; Carruthers, "Compulsory Viewing"; Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*; Losson, "Notes on the Images of the Camps"; and Huppauf, "Emptying the Gaze."

2. Ham's footage of Buchenwald is available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and is viewable online at http://resources.ushmm.org/film/display/detail.php?file_num=1054.

3. Abzug's *Inside the Vicious Heart* discusses the visit made by Eisenhower, who was accompanied by Generals George Patton and Omar Bradley, and the resulting sense of urgency felt by all to encourage both widespread eyewitnessing and documentation of the atrocities they encountered at the camps. See especially pages 20–30 and 132–35.

4. Shandler, *While America Watches*, 3.

5. Carruthers, "Compulsory Viewing," 733–59.

6. Bernd Huppauf references 8mm footage in the context of German soldiers who filmed during the war, but he does not discuss anything beyond still photography in any detail in "Emptying the Gaze," 5.

7. A point about terminology: while I use the term "amateur film" most frequently here, most of the films I am discussing were made by nonprofessional filmmakers for personal use and home viewing, which justifies using the term "home movies" to describe them. However, while many home movies were shot abroad during vacations and business travel, the term "amateur" often seems most appropriate here given the nature of the films' subject matter, which defies most working definitions of the representational parameters of the "home movie." For more on home movie taxonomies, see the report produced for "The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization & Access Summit," http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/Home_Movie_Summit_Final_Report.pdf.

8. See <http://resources.ushmm.org/film/search/index.php>.

9. Interview with Major Norman Hatch (U.S. Marine Core Reserve) by the author on November 15, 2007. A complete version of this interview was published as Orgeron, "Filming the Marines in the Pacific."

10. Ibid., 153.

11. Fernet, "G.I. Movie Makers," 409.

12. Ibid., 442.

13. Schoen, "Combat Cameraman's Communiqué . . .," 81.

14. Universal Camera Corporation, 1944 advertisement, *Home Movies*.

15. Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*, 31.

16. For more on the "unsigned" nature of official footage of the camps, see Losson, "Notes on the Images of the Camps," 26.

17. See <http://sage.library.emory.edu/collection-o6o8.html>.

18. Kushlis, transcript of interview with Dana Kline.
19. Ibid., 1–2.
20. Ibid., 6.
21. Zemel, “Emblems of Atrocity,” 205.
22. Kushlis, transcript of interview with Dana Kline, 5.
23. Zimmermann, “The Home Movie Movement,” 4.
24. Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, 259.
25. Kushlis, transcript of interview with Dana Kline, 6.
26. Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 14.
27. Kushlis, transcript of interview with Dana Kline, 5–6.
28. Errol Morris has published a blog at the *New York Times* website with interesting threads on photography, filming, and reality. The quote is taken from the April 30, 2008, posting: <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/play-it-again-sam-re-enactments-part-one>.
29. Carruthers, “Compulsory Viewing,” 739.
30. See http://resources.ushmm.org/film/display/detail.php?file_num=3841.
31. Colonel Zabin’s son, Steve Zabin, provided the information about his father and interviewed surviving family members about the colonel’s history both during a phone interview with the author and in a fax dated May 16, 2007. He also provided me with a copy of his father’s letter to the *Malverne Herald*, dated May 31, 1945, which is quoted as the title of this section and is also in Colonel Zabin’s file at USHMM. There is some confusion about when Alexander Zabin arrived at Dachau, as there is conflicting information in his USHMM file.
32. E-mail from Polly Petit, who recorded an oral history with William Fedeli that is available at LOC, to Marsha Orgeron, May 14, 2007. See also <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005322>. Fedeli’s oral history is available on cassette tape in the Veterans History Project at LOC.
33. This letter is in the personal collection of Christa Lang Fuller.
34. See Orgeron, “Liberating Images?” and “The Most Profound Shock.”
35. Fuller calls the footage this in Weiss’s documentary *Falkenau*.
36. Milton, “The Camera as Weapon,” 60.
37. Zimmerman, “The Home Movie Movement,” 5.
38. Fuller, *A Third Face*, 374.