



The Lessons of Nuremberg

In our opinion the following source speaks for itself. It is a report of Military Government's Opinion Surveys Branch about audience reactions to the film "Nürnberg und seine Lehren" (The Lessons of Nuremberg) in the city where the trials against the major war criminals took place. We do not know the film but it is obvious that OMGUS took particular interest in it, thus being likely to have initiated and substantially sponsored the project.

Besides the local pun to ask the inhabitants of the very city about "the lessons of Nuremberg" - their feedback did not differ significantly from Würzburg and Bamberg - this report can be seen as the balance sheet of American reeducation policies in Germany as a whole, because it had been compiled only a couple of weeks before Western Germany regained (at first limited) sovereignty in May 1949.

In closing OSB's specialists themselves are analyzing their survey's results. Today's reader of these more or less optimistic conclusions has to keep in mind the circumstances and aims of the report. Who wants to write down that an effort by oneself or even one's superiors has had not much of an output? No one. In order to fully understand this document, it is necessary also to notice the message between the lines.

rijo

Nürnberg Reaction to the Film "Nürnberg und seine Lehren" (The Lessons of Nuremberg)

A Survey of Audience Reaction.

15 March 1949, Opinion Surveys Branch, Information Services
Division, OMGUS, APO 696-A, Nuremberg, Germany.

Introduction

The Opinion Surveys Branch, ISD, OMGUS, conducted a survey of audience reactions to the film "Nürnberg und seine Lehren" (The Lessons of Nuremberg). The survey was made in Nuremberg on February 3 and February 8, [19]49 following one afternoon and 3 evening performances. The audience was handed short write-in questionnaires and requested to fill them out immediately following the showing of the picture. In all 386 persons or better than 60% of the total audience turned in completed questionnaires.

To check on the validity of results obtained in Nuremberg the same audience reaction survey was made in Würzburg and Bamberg. Although the following report is based on the results obtained in Nuremberg only, results of our Würzburg and Bamberg studies bore out our Nuremberg findings in all major points.

Summary of Reactions to “The Lessons of Nuremberg”

- The overwhelming majority agreed with the message conveyed in the film and wanted this message to be spread. (85%)
- An almost equally large majority believed in the factual basis of most all that was portrayed in the film. (82%)
- Seven out of ten people also considered the verdicts against the chief war criminals just.

The Audience

The people who saw “Nürnberg und seine Lehren” were, so far as age concerned, quite representative of the Nuremberg population as a whole, not showing any marked deviations; but in as much as movie audience in Nuremberg is generally recruited to a greater extent from younger people, it can be said that this particular audience was somewhat older than average Nuremberg movie-goers usually are.

The “Nürnberg und seine Lehren” audience differed greatly from both the ratio of men and women in Nuremberg as well as from the proportion of men and women usually attending movies, in that this particular audience was composed largely of men (72%) and of only 28% women.

The average person who went to see “Nürnberg und seine Lehren” had slightly more than 8 years of schooling, deviating in this respect from the population at large.

Summing up it can be said that a 40 year old man with 9 years of schooling by occupation a skilled laborer or clerk was Mr. Average Audience.

The nature of this film (concentration camp scenes etc) probably prevented more women from attending it.

Attendance figures in Nuremberg, Bamberg and Würzburg showed that word of mouth propaganda was a negative or at least neutral factor, as attendance figures steadily decreased during the run of the film in the theaters surveyed.

General Reaction

A very significant majority of 85% thought the picture worthy of recommendation to their friends and acquaintances.

“Would you recommend the picture ‘Nürnberg und seine Lehren’ to your friends and acquaintances?”

	TOTAL	AGE		SEX		EDUCATION	
		till 29 years	30 years and over	Men	Women	8 years or less	9 years ore more
YES	85%	81%	86%	85%	85%	91%	81%
NO	14%	18%	13%	15%	12%	8%	19%
No Answer	1%	1%	1%	-	3%	1%	-
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

As seen from above table, the people who would recommend this film to their acquaintance-ship did not differ very much in age, sex or education.

Belief in Authenticity of Picture

A very large majority of 82% believed that most everything shown in the film corresponded to actual fact, portraying things as they had happened in reality.

More young and better educated people tended to be skeptical of the film's authentic basis than older and less well educated persons. The majority of young and better educated members of the audience however, also accepted the film as authentic. There was no difference between men and women so far as believing in the authentic nature of the film was concerned.

“Do you believe that all that was shown in this picture, generally corresponds to actual facts?”

	TOTAL	AGE		SEX		EDUCATION	
		till 29 years	30 years and over	Men	Women	8 years or less	9 years ore more
YES	82%	73%	86%	82%	80%	86%	75%
NO	14%	20%	12%	15%	14%	9%	21%
No answer or qualified answers	4%	7%	2%	3%	6%	5%	4%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Specific Reactions

Respondents were asked what particularly impressed them in this film. Answers to this question varied greatly, with the following three topics leading all others by a large margin:

- 1) Cruelties committed by the Nazi regime against Jews, prisoners of war, anti-Nazis, populations as a whole (16%);
- 2) Partiality ... as the film showed only Nazi crimes and not those committed by the Allies, especially by the Russians (12%);
- 3) The just and fair sentence and truthful portrayal of proceedings.

Other comments given less frequently included such topics as:

- The accused made a bad impression (3%),
- Russia is not in a position to pronounce sentence on anyone (3%),
- the technical perfection of the film (2%) etc.

“What particularly impressed you in the film ‘Nürnberg und seine Lehren’?”

	TOTAL	AGE		SEX		EDUCATION	
		till 29 years	30 years and over	Men	Women	8 years or less	9 years ore more
Cruelties vs. Jews, POWs, anti-Nazis etc.	16	24%	14%	15%	22%	9%	23%
Partiality of the film	12%	10%	13%	14%	8%	6%	19%
Just and fair sentence	9%	9%	8%	10%	5%	11%	7%
Russia no judge	3%	-	4%	3%	2%	1%	4%

Other replies were given only very infrequently.

To an almost negligible extent men appeared less impressed by the cruelties shown, and more impressed by the partiality of the film than women, otherwise there were no marked group differences so far as the frequency of mention of particular impressions made by this film were concerned.

Reaction to International Military Tribunal Sentence

Finally, respondents were asked their opinion about the sentence pronounced by the International Military Tribunal. In as much as these sentences had previously received wide publicity, it can be assumed (see previous ISD Opinion Surveys study No 33, 18 Dec [19]46 which showed that 93% of the population knew what the results were) that the audience of this film had made up their mind about the justice of the sentences some time ago. At that time (Nov 1946), about 10% of the population thought the sentences too harsh, about 20% considered them too lenient and 55% termed them „just”. This should be considered when studying the table below.

“Do you think that the verdicts handed down by Military Tribunal against these accused (Göring, Hess etc.) were ‘just’?”

	TOTAL	AGE		SEX		EDUCATION	
		till 29 years	30 years and over	Men	Women	8 years or less	9 years ore more
YES	71%	66%	73%	68%	74%	82%	62%
NO	22%	26%	21%	24%	18%	10%	31%
No answer or qualified answers	7%	8%	6%	8%	8%	8%	7%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

A very large and significant majority of 71% considered the verdicts just. Only about two out of ten people found the sentences unjustified. Persons under 30 years of age and men tended to regard the verdicts unjust slightly more often than people over 30 years old and women, but differences appeared insignificantly small. The only real difference was based on education; the better educated tended to a greater extent to regard the sentences unjustified (31%) than less well educated (10%).

[Analysis]

Analyzing the results of this audience reaction survey [the] following conclusions can be reached:

An overwhelming majority agreed with the message conveyed in this film and wanted this message to be spread. An equally large majority believed in the factual basis of most all that this film portrayed. Judging on this basis the mission and propaganda value of this film would have been largely achieved, but the following limitations will have to be borne in mind.

The film was generally shown in cinemas with small audience capacity and attendance figures showed that during the course of the film-run attendance figures steadily decreased, forcing some theaters (Würzburg) to shorten planned running time. It would therefore appear, that the audiences reached by this film were quite limited in scope, which brings up the question whether in future documentary films of this type should not be substituted by regular feature films more subtly carrying the message to be conveyed.

Furthermore, it should be considered that, while 71% of the audience interviewed voiced approval of the verdicts, 55% of the population as a whole had voiced this approval in Nov [19]46 already. Now, if the audience questioned actually was representative of the population as a whole, it would have meant that 16% who did not think the sentences justified in 1946 have been won over after seeing the film "Nürnberg und seine Lehren"? But we are not in a position to reach such a conclusion, it appears very dangerous to assume that the people who went to see "Nürnberg und seine Lehren" actually represented a cross section of the population. Results showed that except for age, the audience was in no way representative of the population at large, so that the fact that 71% of the audience questioned agreed with the verdicts as compared to 55% of the population as a whole cannot be construed as meaning that this film converted some (16%) people into thinking the verdicts just.

In contrary, thought must be given to the possibility that these audiences were to begin with inclined to be more convinced of the factual truths of happenings shown, and of the justice of the sentences than the population at large. This would mean that the film largely carried its message to an audience which by and large believed in it to begin with, and that it failed to reach the concentrations of those who need reeducation in this respect. (Suggestion made in first part of analysis is recalled here.) Finally, it should not be overlooked that approximately 4 out of ten people who saw this film failed to answer any questions put to them.

The original document can be found at NARA in the holding OMGUS Information Control Division, Opinion Surveys Branch, Box No. 147, Folder No. 5/233-2/6. A copy is kept at Nuremberg City Archives (finding number F 6 No. 404).

Index*

Home*