

DEFIANCE

Dear Librarian,

During the Holocaust, some six million Jews were systematically murdered as a result of Nazi genocidal policies. But there were also approximately 20,000 to 30,000 Jewish men and women who banded together in resistance groups to fight the Nazis and their collaborators.

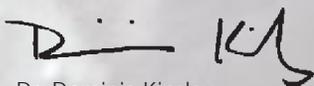
Defiance, the Paramount Vantage film opening in theaters this January, tells the true story of some of these unknown heroes. Directed by Edward Zwick and starring Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, and Jamie Bell, **Defiance** is the epic tale of three brothers—Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski—who risked their lives and rose up against Nazi tyranny and seemingly insurmountable odds, after their family was murdered and their village was destroyed. Unlike almost all other resistance groups, who welcomed only young, able-bodied men and women who could fight, the Bielskis welcomed all, conducting what would become the largest rescue of Jews by Jews during World War II, ultimately saving some 1,200 Jewish men, women, and children.

Defiance is more than the tale of one heroic group that came to be known as the Bielski Otriad. On a larger scale, it is the story of all those brave resistance fighters who—counter to the prevailing image of European Jews as helpless victims—defied the Nazis and carried out an extraordinary effort to ensure their survival and freedom.

Defiance brings to life a chapter of history that needs to be told. To that end, we hope that you encourage your patrons to view the film, and to use the resources in your library to learn more about the Holocaust and the brave men and women who risked their lives as part of the Jewish resistance effort. You can do so by displaying the enclosed poster in a prominent location and by creating a display of books, films, and other materials in your collection that deal with the Holocaust.

The back of this letter contains a list of additional references that provide valuable information about the Holocaust and the efforts of members of the Jewish resistance. There also is a set of questions designed to generate interest in this topic. We hope you will make it available near the poster as a handout for your patrons.

Sincerely,



Dr. Dominic Kinsley
Editor in Chief

FILM SYNOPSIS

Based on an extraordinary true story, **Defiance** is an epic tale of family, honor, vengeance, and salvation in World War II. The year is 1941 and the Jews of Eastern Europe are being massacred by the thousands. Managing to escape certain death, three brothers take refuge in the dense surrounding woods they have known since childhood. There they begin their desperate battle against the Nazis. Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, and Jamie Bell star as brothers who turn a primitive struggle to survive into something far more consequential—a way to avenge the deaths of their loved ones by saving thousands of others.

At first it is all they can do to stay alive. But gradually, as whispers of their daring

spread, they begin to attract others—men and women, young and old—willing to risk everything for the sake of even a moment's freedom. Tuvia (CRAIG) is a reluctant leader and his decisions are challenged by his brother, Zus (SCHREIBER) who worries that Tuvia's idealistic plans will doom them all. Asael (BELL) is the youngest—caught between his brothers' fierce rivalry. As a brutal winter descends, they work to create a community, and to keep faith alive when all humanity appeared to be lost.

Defiance is directed by Edward Zwick (*BLOOD DIAMOND*, *GLORY*) from a screenplay by Zwick and Clay Frohman, based on Nechama Tec's non-fiction book of the same name.



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TO BEGIN...

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST AND JEWISH RESISTANCE?

Answer each of these questions with "true" or "false":

- _____ 1. Adolf Hitler took advantage of the dire economic conditions in Germany in his ascent to power.
- _____ 2. The Nuremberg Laws were an outcome of the Nuremberg War Crime Trials.
- _____ 3. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was also known as the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact.
- _____ 4. Russian partisans and Jewish partisans fought against the Nazis during World War II.
- _____ 5. Jewish resistance during the Holocaust consisted of guerilla fighters who continually engaged the German troops in combat.
- _____ 6. There were about 5,000 Jewish partisans— Jews who formed organized, armed resistance groups and who fought back against the Nazis.
- _____ 7. Spiritual resistance during World War II was limited to prayer.
- _____ 8. Jewish partisans in or near the Soviet Union relied heavily on the support of Russian partisan groups in their efforts to undermine the Nazis.
- _____ 9. The Bielski brothers, whose story is told in the film *Defiance*, like many other Jewish partisans, saved the lives of thousands of Jews.

TO LEARN MORE...

WEBSITES

- *Defiance*, www.defiancemovie.com
- Anti-Defamation League, www.adl.org
- Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation, www.jewishpartisans.org
- Museum of Jewish Heritage, www.mjhnyc.org
- Simon Wiesenthal Center, www.wiesenthal.com
- The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, www.jfr.org
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org

BOOKS

- *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, by Nechama Tec. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance During the Holocaust* by Yitzhak Mais (ed). Museum of Jewish Heritage, April 2007.
- *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, by Reuben Ainsztein. Harper & Row, 1974.
- *On Both Sides of the Wall*, by Vladkka Meed. Schocken Books, June 1993.
- *Resisting the Holocaust*, by Ruby Rohrlich (ed.). Berg, 1998.

FILMS

- *Defiance* (2008)
- *Daring to Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust* (1986)
- *Flames in the Ashes* (1986)
- *Resistance: Untold Stories of the Jewish Partisans* (2001)
- *The Partisans of Vilna* (1987)
- Eight short films on various Jewish partisan subjects by the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation (www.jewishpartisans.org/films.php)

Answer Key: (1) True. Inflation was rampant in Germany from 1920-1923. From 1919-1925 and after the depression of 1929, many people were without jobs, and Hitler positioned himself as someone who could unite the country and solve its problems. (2) False. Enacted in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their German citizenship. The Nuremberg trials took place after the war and brought major German war criminals to international justice. They subsequently became the model for trying others for genocide and war crimes. (3) True. Signed just a few days before the beginning of World War II, this pact divided Poland between the Germans and the Soviets. (4) True. Most Russian partisans were soldiers who had escaped when the Germans marched on the Soviet Union and who were now hiding, like the Jews, in the forests and swamps of Belarus. (5) False. While some members of the resistance were fighters, many others engaged in nonviolent activities such as providing medical care or acting as forgers, smugglers, sentries, and raiders. (6) False. Approximately 20,000-30,000 Jews were engaged in partisan activities. (7) False. Spiritual resistance — designed to keep the Jewish faith and culture alive — took many forms. Artists and poets continued to perform, underground newspapers were published, children continued to be educated, etc. (8) False. While some Jewish and Russian partisans did work together, there was usually little trust between them and their relationship was tenuous at best. (9) True. There were many Jewish partisans who saved thousands of Jews through a variety of means — from feeding and clothing Jews in the forest, to smuggling Jews out of ghettos, to forming all-Jewish partisan groups, to providing weapons to Jews so they could join partisan groups, to hiding their Jewish identity.

