

The Jüdischer Kulturbund Filmbühne and the Jewish-German Community in the Third Reich, 1938-1941

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Abstract

This thesis presents the first in-depth study of the impact the Filmbühne (film stage) had in the lives of German Jews living under the systematic oppression of the Nazi regime. The Filmbühne was an extension of the Jüdischer Kulturbund, a Jewish organization which offered cultural activities exclusively for Jews in the Third Reich between 1933 and 1941. The Filmbühne opened in December 1938 and provided Jews in Berlin an opportunity to view films, an activity which had been forbidden to them in the previous month. This thesis first reconstructs the Filmbühne itself, including who attended the film screenings, what was shown, the cinema's function within the larger Kulturbund organization, and why the Nazi authorities allowed it to exist. The following chapter analyzes diaries, essays, and letters of personal correspondence in order to determine how individual German Jews interacted with the cinema and the different ways the organization affected their daily lives. The final chapter is devoted to the ways in which films were presented to the Jewish community in Germany through film reviews in the Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt, the only surviving Jewish newspaper at the time. This study illustrates how these film reviews resisted the prevailing ideology of the Nazi regime, reflected both in the films' plots and their reviews in non-Jewish newspapers in the Third Reich, and articulated a particularly Jewish cultural perspective. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates how the Jewish reviews of the Filmbühne screenings were used as a pretext to circumvent strict Nazi censorship in order to send messages to the Jewish communities across the German Reich, having a much greater impact than merely affecting the individuals who actually attended the film screenings. Ultimately this study discusses the variety of ways that the Filmbühne affected the lives of German Jews, most notably by increasing quality of life and serving as a valuable communication tool that subverted Nazi ideology and opposed the Nazi regime's policy of cultural segregation, and sent messages of validation and encouragement to the Jewish community.