CHAPTER 2

The Ben Urwand Controversy: Exploring the Hollywood-Hitler Relationship

INTRODUCTION

Few film history books, and none from a Jewish angle, provoked more controversy in recent years than Ben Urwand’s *Collaboration: Hollywood’s Pact with Hitler*, published in late 2013. The book’s incendiary nature, flaunted in its title, would have created a critical firestorm in any case. But the fortuitous publication earlier that same year of Thomas Doherty’s *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933–1939*, a more sober account of the major Hollywood studios’ engagement with the Nazi regime, stoked a fierce debate on the issue. Besides the flurry of radio interviews and reviews in academic journals, the popular press, and on-line, several conference panels were held on the topic. This chapter capsulizes the Urwand controversy by reprising two papers, presented at the Western Jewish Studies Conference in Tucson, Arizona, on May 4, 2014, which take opposing views on the controversy. A coda briefly discusses two other books in the works at the time, by Laura Rosenzweig and Steven Ross, which tended to counter, or at least, significantly qualify, Urwand’s broadside, adding another tantalizing dimension to the brouhaha.