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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 89, Folder 11, Redgrave, Vanessa, 1980.



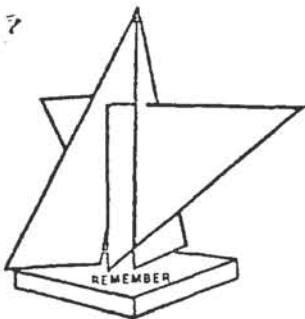
THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date September 4, 1980
to Area Directors and Executive Assistants
from Samuel Rabinove
subject Vanessa Redgrave in "Playing for Time"

As you may have heard, CBS has announced that "Playing for Time", a made-for-television film based on the memoirs of an Auschwitz survivor, will be shown on September 30. Those who have viewed it say it is a powerful, though depressing, production. The film, of course, created a great deal of controversy last year when it was announced that Vanessa Redgrave, who is a vociferous champion of the PLO, had been selected to play the role of the heroine, Fania Fenelon.

There is no question whatever that the choice of Miss Redgrave to play this particular role reflected an incredible lack of sensitivity on the part of CBS. Her selection deserved to be protested -- and it was. Just as CBS has the right to cast anyone it wishes in any role, interested citizens and groups have a corresponding right to castigate CBS for its bad taste and poor judgment. But sharp criticism of CBS is one thing; calls for suppression or boycott, which may establish a dangerous precedent, are quite another.

In AJC's Statement on Censorship, adopted in 1951, we say: "...it is the policy of the American Jewish Committee to refrain from actions designed to censor or suppress a work of art -- whether a film, a book, or a stage, radio or television play..." Essentially it is our view that, on balance, efforts to censor or boycott productions (or aspects thereof) that may offend our sensibilities are likely to do far more harm than good. To attempt to impose a political test of any kind on an artist's right to work smacks of a "blacklist" and is a form of censorship. All factors considered, it is our view that further pressure on CBS on this issue at this time will serve no useful purpose.



30"7

September 4, 1980

Dear Colleague;

Enclosed please find a news release that has been sent to the national press corp. It will bring you up-to-date on the grossly insensitive actions being taken by CBS against the Jewish community. We urge you as a community leader to inform your constituency during the High Holy Days to switch-off "Playing for Time" starring the arch enemy of Israel, Vanessa Redgrave. We also ask that you register your feelings about CBS' callous action, with the local CBS station in your city.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Abraham Cooper
Rabbi Abraham Cooper,
Assistant to the Dean
Simon Wiesenthal Center

SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 3, 1980

A call to the Jewish community to switch-off CBS' "Playing for Time", which portrays Vanessa Redgrave, an advocate of international terrorism, as an Auschwitz heroine, was issued today by Rabbi Marvin Hier, Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, in light of CBS' announcement that they will air the program during the Jewish High Holy Day period, September 30th, "In a final display of insensitvity, when Jews around the world are engaged in introspection and when the victims of the Holocaust are publicly memorialized, CBS' decision to champion the rights of Vanessa Redgrave at the expense of the feelings of Fania Fenelon and the millions of Hitler's victims, is a gross violation of the public trust the American people have a right to expect from a national network," said Rabbi Hier. "By going ahead with the broadcast of this program, CBS is telling us that television is no place to demonstrate public responsibility and communal sensitivity about not trampling on the feelings of others. In fact, CBS has never properly addressed the opinions expressed by hundreds of thousands of Americans and dozens of organizations following their initial announcement that Vanessa Redgrave, a person who counts as her allies the Khomeinis, Arafats, and Khadfys of the world, would play Fania Fenelon. At one point, Gene Mater, Vice President of CBS, labeled the national campaign on behalf of Ms. Fenelon and the entire Jewish community, as analogous to the actions taken by the Nazis against the Jews. Although CBS officials and Arthur Miller have tried to unsuccessfully project the issue as blacklisting, while simultaneously maintaining silence in the face of Redgrave's call for a show business boycott of Israel, Americans have rallied behind Fania because of CBS' callous disregard for her story, her feelings, and her life."

(more)

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In a telephone call from Paris, Fania Fenelon said, "I have waited 35 years to have my story told and no one would have wanted to watch such a television movie more than I, but, I ask you from the bottom of my heart not to watch CBS and Vanessa Redgrave turn my legacy and labor of love into a nightmare. I know the American people, they are fair and honest, they will understand this is my story, this is not a fiction, Auschwitz was my agony, my pain -- and I appeal to the fair sense of the American public not to watch this fiasco. I am gratified to know that the Wiesenthal Center is calling for a national switch-off and I hope millions of Americans will join dozens of major advertising companies in heeding this call for justice. Call your local CBS station and let them know that you will not be watching on September 30th. Remember...the memory of Auschwitz is best preserved when those who would give it expression are not themselves advocates of terrorism and bloodshed."

(The advertising companies that Ms. Fenelon is referring to include Johnson & Johnson, the Pillsbury Company, General Motors, the Coca-Cola Company, Wm. Wrigley Jr., Company, and many others who do not plan to participate in sponsoring "Playing for Time")

(The exact quote that Rabbi Hier is referring to from Gene Mater, Vice President of CBS, was made November 1979 -- "I hate to bring up the period of the '30s in Nazi Germany, but before the Holocaust started as such, before the Jews were indeed exterminated en masse, that some of the earliest rules did not permit for i.e. Jews to appear on the stage or to write for newspapers, etc. and I cannot see putting CBS in the position of anything analogous to that")

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