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## NOT Everything is Illuminated

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*Prague Post*

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# NOT Everything is Illuminated

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By Ivan Katchanovski

Everything Is Illuminated distorts history by omitting crucial facts, including an important link to the Czech Republic

By Ivan Katchanovski

As the recent controversy about *The Passion of the Christ* and the election of a movie star as governor of California show, movies are not only entertainment but also sources of negative and positive stereotypes. An upcoming Hollywood film, much of which was filmed in Prague this summer, promotes such negative stereotypes. Furthermore, the book on which it was based, *Everything Is Illuminated*, distorts history by omitting crucial facts.

Among the omissions in author Jonathan Safran Foer's tale is the mass execution of residents of a Ukrainian village in retaliation for having helped their Jewish neighbors. Ironically these Jewish neighbors quite possibly included Foer's grandfather. Furthermore, Foer also ignores an important link to the Czech Republic.

The best-selling book deals with a tragic chapter in Jewish history. It presents a fictional story based on a real trip undertaken by the young American author to Ukraine to locate a woman who possibly saved his Jewish grandfather during World War II.

Because my research on the politics of mass terror happened to deal with the area of Ukraine depicted in the movie and in the book, I decided to seek an answer to a question no one was asking: What did happen in real life as opposed to the fictional account given in the book and movie?

When Foer, who uses his real name and names of real places in Ukraine in his book, went to Ukraine to locate a rescuer of his grandfather, he found nothing. So he wrote the novel based on his imagination. It took me about the same amount of time as the author had spent researching to find published sources and to make a trip from the United States to a part of Ukraine portrayed in the book.

Trachimbrod, or Trochimbrod in Ukrainian, was a Jewish village in the Volyn region near the city of Lutsk. The village was also called Sofievka, after a German-born mother of a Russian czar who sanctioned the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies, including Trochimbrod, in the beginning of the 19th century. Its population consisted of 1,500-2,000 Jews before the start of World War II, but it almost doubled when Nazis brought in Jews from nearby villages and small towns and established a ghetto after they occupied Ukraine.

The Nazis liquidated the Trochimbrod ghetto in August and September 1942, with a German killing squad executing several thousand Jews. The local police force, which at that time consisted primarily of Ukrainians, helped round up Jews. Fewer than 200 survivors managed to escape the massacres in the ghetto and in another nearby Jewish village.

The story of their rescue, pieced together from materials of the Klubochin village museum, eyewitness accounts and memoirs of Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian partisans is very different from the one depicted in the book. On Nov. 4, 1942, the Nazis with the help of the local police force executed 137 residents (including women, elderly people and 36 children) of Klubochin, a Ukrainian village located a couple of miles from Trochimbrod. Afterward they burned the village. As it turns out, this massacre was a reprisal for the actions of Ukrainian partisans who had helped Trochimbrod Jews. These partisans from Klubochin and neighboring villages took up arms against the Nazis and their collaborators, supplied weapons to a Jewish resistance group in Trochimbrod and executed a local peasant for killing Jews who escaped the Nazi massacres. The Klubochin partisans accepted Jewish partisans from Trochimbrod into their unit and provided protection to more than 150 Jewish survivors who escaped from the Nazi massacre in this village and nearby smaller Jewish settlements and were hiding in a forest near Klubochin. It's quite likely that Foer's grandfather was one of these survivors.

Many of these Jews later joined another Soviet/Ukrainian partisan unit in the region. Most were killed during combat with the Nazis. Only about 40 Jews from Trochimbrod survived until the end of the war.

#### Sharp contrast

This story stands in a sharp contrast to claims made in the book. The author finds no Ukrainian rescuers of his grandfather and implicates a fictional grandfather of the main Ukrainian hero, Ukrainian neighbors and a Ukrainian-speaking Nazi general in the massacre in Trochimbrod. The book even states, "Ukrainians back then were terrible to the Jews. They were almost as bad as the Nazis."

The entire ethnic group is put alongside an organization responsible for killing of tens of millions of people, including millions of Ukrainians. The Nazis executed not only whole Ukrainian families but also whole villages for rendering any aid, such as food or shelter, to partisans, Jews or Soviet prisoners of war. They intended to exterminate, enslave or expel to Siberia the absolute majority of Ukrainians, whom they considered racially inferior. Several million Ukrainians died fighting Nazi aggression. The number of Ukrainians who became victims of the Nazi genocidal policy or who fought the Nazis during World War II was several dozen times higher than the number of Ukrainians who collaborated with the Nazis.

Like the information about the Jewish Holocaust that was suppressed by the Soviet government, however, the Ukrainian side of World War II remained largely unknown in the United States because of Cold War politics. Only in 1992, when Ukraine became independent, was a memorial sign erected on the site of the massacre in Trochimbrod, now just a historical name because the village was razed during the war. Similarly, the stories of the massacres in Klubochin and many other Ukrainian villages, such as nearby Kortelisy, where the Nazis executed nearly 3,000 residents in a single September 1942 day, remain completely unknown in the United States. On average, Ukrainians suffered death and destruction on the level of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks every day for more than two years during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine.

While the book describes Ukrainians as very unhelpful and even obstructive, the local people whom I met during my trip to Ukraine were ready to lend a hand and provide information about Trochimbrod. The director of the museum in Klubochin, Vasily Matsuyk, told me about Nazi massacres in his village and in nearby Trochimbrod, as well as a story of a Ukrainian family murdered by the Nazis for hiding Jews in Klubochin. Ivan Filuyk, an elderly survivor of the massacre in Klubochin, vividly remembered how he attended school in Trochimbrod along with several other Ukrainian children. Valentina Shtinko, a journalist for Volyn, the main newspaper in the region, published an article on the Trochimbroad memorial. I saw two documentary films on regional television about a Jewish woman who survived the massacre in Trochimbrod and was hidden by a peasant family and then was rescued by Ukrainian partisans. She immigrated to Israel but later returned to Ukraine and now lives in Lutsk.

#### Czech links?

There is even a possibility that the woman who helped to rescue the author's grandfather was a Czech. Augustina, the name of the woman in the book and the film, sounds more Central European than Ukrainian. Thousands of Czechs lived in the Volyn region before the Soviet government expelled them to Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of World War II. The Volyn Czechs were more closely linked and faced less-severe punishment than their Ukrainian neighbors for hiding Jews during the war.

In the house in which I grew up in the Volyn region, a Czech family had a concealed underground shelter used for hiding Jews. The real-life hero of the movie might be actually found in the Czech Republic.

Many people will read *Everything Is Illuminated* and many more are likely to see the film version, directed by Liev Schreiber and starring Elijah Wood of "Lord of the Rings" fame. Sadly, they would remain utterly in the dark about the real events as opposed to their fictional stereotypical portrayal. Similarly, they would remain ignorant about the Czech link to the events depicted in the movie, which ironically was filmed in the Czech Republic.

- The author, a visiting scholar at the Centennial Center of the American Political Association in Washington, D.C., is working on a book-length manuscript on politics and terror in the Soviet Union. He currently is conducting field research in Ukraine.

By Ivan Katchanovski

Nevertheless, *Everything Is Illuminated* has a haunting afterglow, one that neither satisfies nor illuminates, but at least keeps the flame alive. October 22, 2005 | Rating: 2.5/5 | Full Review | Marjorie Baumgarten. Everything is illuminated in the light of the past. Alex: I have reflected many times upon our rigid search. It has shown me that everything is illuminated in the light of the past. View All Quotes. Movie & TV guides. Everything is illuminate..., p.1. Everything Is Illuminated, p.1. Jonathan Safran Foer. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30. Everything is Illuminated. Jonathan Safran Foer. Table of Contents. One day you will do things for me that you hate. That is what it means to be a family." What she does not clutch is that I already do things for her that I hate. I listen to her when she talks to me. I resist complaining about my pygmy allowance. And did I mention that I do not spleen her nearly so much as I desire to? But I do not do these things because we are a family. I do them because they are common decencies. That is an idiom that the hero taught me. I do them because I am not a big fucking asshole. That is another idiom that the hero taught me. Everything Is Illuminated Script - Dialogue Transcript. Voila! Finally, the Everything Is Illuminated script is here for all you quotes spouting fans of the Liev Schreiber movie from the Jonathan Safran Foer novel. This script is a transcript that was painstakingly transcribed using the screenplay and/or viewings of *Everything Is Illuminated*. I know, I know, I still need to get the cast names in there and I'll be eternally tweaking it, so if you have any corrections, feel free to drop me a line. You won't hurt my feelings. Honest. Everything Is Illuminated Script. I will be truthful and mention that before our rigid search I had the opinion Jewish people were having shit between their brains.