

THE MAD DOG OF EUROPE



LE BUREAU PRESENTS

THE MAD DOG OF EUROPE

a film by Rubika Shah

DOCUMENTARY - FRANCE, GERMANY - 83min - 1.85 - 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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“After initially arousing a certain degree of mistrust in European and North American chanceries, the Nazi regime that took hold in Germany from 1933 onward was not only tolerated but came to be seen as a political partner one avoided criticizing. Beyond the vast financial interests at stake—Nazi Germany being a favored investment field—this *rapprochement* was based on ideological convergences within the Western world, including racism and antisemitism. Hollywood was not spared from this economic and ideological collusion, which hindered the production of *Mad Dog of Europe*.”

Nicolas Morzelle,

PhD candidate at the University of Caen Normandy

SYNOPSIS

In 1932, Herman J. Mankiewicz - who would become famous ten years later for writing the screenplay of *Citizen Kane*, wrote *The Mad Dog of Europe*, an anti-Nazi film project depicting the implosion of a German-Jewish family at the dawn of Hitler's rise to power. This visionary script was ultimately buried by Hollywood studios, caught between diplomatic pressure and economic interests, and was never produced. Its story resonates powerfully with the increasingly dangerous ideological fractures of our own time.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the early 1930s, Europe was a **deeply fragile continent**. The First World War had left behind traumatized societies, exhausted economies, and **unstable political regimes**. The Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, imposed very heavy territorial, military, and financial penalties on Germany. This punitive peace fueled a sense of national humiliation and widespread distrust of the Weimar Republic democratic institutions.

This instability was compounded by the **global economic crisis** triggered by the 1929 stock market crash. Mass unemployment, poverty, and social anxiety hit Germany particularly hard, but also affected many European countries. In this context, **authoritarian ideologies gained ground** by promising order, security, and national renewal. The Nazi Party exploited these fears and frustrations, **bringing Adolf Hitler to power in 1933**. From the outset, the regime implemented policies of internal repression and antisemitic persecution, while clearly expressing its intention to revise the European order.

Contrary to the idea that the Nazi threat was only understood in hindsight, some observers—journalists, intellectuals, artists—recognized the danger very early on. It was in this climate that, as early as 1932, American screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz

wrote *The Mad Dog of Europe*, a film project that explicitly denounced Hitler and warned of the consequences of his rise on both a local and international scale. The script predicted a **political and moral catastrophe** that many still preferred to downplay or ignore.

The United States, however, adopted a largely **isolationist stance** during the 1930s. Traumatized by the First World War and severely affected by the Great Depression, American society focused on its internal issues and largely rejected involvement in European affairs. A similar attitude prevailed in Hollywood: although some artists wished to take a stand, major studios **feared the economic and diplomatic repercussions** of an openly anti-Nazi film, including the risk of losing foreign markets and provoking tensions with Germany.

The project *The Mad Dog of Europe* was therefore never produced. The documentary, bearing the same title, revisits this abandoned work to highlight the key moment of **when inaction becomes political**. Through this story, the film questions **political, moral, and artistic responsibility** in the face of the rise of fascism, and shows how silence, caution, or economic interests can delay awareness—and perhaps, in doing so, **delay resistance**.



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PRODUCERS NOTE

During our harmonious first collaboration, we realized that we shared the same vision of cinema and production. Both of us often refer to a quote by David Puttnam: “The films we produce must transcend profit and loss accounts. They must be profitable, but that is not enough. We also have other responsibilities.”

It seemed very important and meaningful to us for *The Mad Dog of Europe* to be a co-production between France and Germany, as this film revisits a period in history when our two countries were enemies—whereas today we are happy to consider them as friends. Based on the true story of a film that was never made, this documentary draws from a script that anticipated Adolf Hitler’s rise to power, the World War II that followed, and which sought to warn audiences about fore coming events. *The Mad Dog of Europe* is both a tribute to cinema and a plea against the rise of nationalism currently re-emerging in many parts of the world—a theme that transcends borders. Indeed, thanks to the European Union, France and Germany now face the same dangers and share a common destiny. The same applies to our respective national cinema industries, which are a powerful foundation for our democracies and for freedom of expression—making a film like *The Mad Dog of Europe* all the more important and urgent today.

It is a film that examines the mechanisms of political agitation and the threat it poses to the entertainment industry.

Bettina Brokemper & Bertrand Faivre



“Herman J. Mankiewicz’s struggle to bring *The Mad Dog of Europe* to the screen captures the essence of what it means to be an outsider trying to alter the course of an imperfect world. Perhaps one of Mankiewicz’s finest screenplays—and certainly his most political—*Mad Dog* is a journey into what embodies the power of cinema, from Hollywood to Berlin, on the eve of a world war. The film begins in the early 1930s, when Mankiewicz was working as a writer at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and runs up to the start of World War II. To me, the *Mad Dog* screenplay is both the unveiling of an incredible mystery and of a political context that reveals why this film was never made.”

Rubika Shah



"There is something unique and fascinating in understanding why a screenplay like *Mad Dog* was never produced, and what that reveals about the foundations of the American Dream and its legitimacy. It is a story of capitalism, global politics, fascism, and antisemitism—and, crucially, of the enduring power of cinema."

Rubika Shah

BIOGRAPHY OF RUBIKA SHAH

Rubika grew up between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia. She began her career at Universal Music Group before directing short documentary films for BBC News. Her first feature documentary, *White Riot* (released in France in August 2020), was critically acclaimed and won multiple awards, marking a major turning point in her career.

White Riot combines Rubika's musical knowledge with her passion for cinema. It sheds light on the Rock Against Racism movement using archival footage, punk-style animation and an original soundtrack. The film won the Grierson Award for Best Documentary at the BFI London Film Festival, received a special mention at the Berlin International Film Festival, and was selected as a "Critics' Pick" by The New York Times. *White Riot* also had her nominated at the 2020 BAFTA Awards in the Best Breakthrough category of (as writer, director, and producer).

In 2021, Bertrand Faivre (Le Bureau) discovered the documentary *The Dissident* by Bryan Fogel. Despite its many awards, the film was not acquired by any platform due to its strong political nature. This situation reminded him of the story of an unproduced screenplay in pre-war Hollywood—that of Herman J. Mankiewicz. He then contacted Rubika, whose documentary had struck him for its intersection of historical, social, and political issues, and invited her to direct *The Mad Dog of Europe* to bring this past story, with its striking contemporary resonance, to light.

Rubika is currently developing her first fiction feature, *Qisat Sauedia* (A Saudi Tale), an irreverent coming-of-age drama set in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s in collaboration with BBC Film.

FILMS PARTICIPANTS

NICK DAVIS

Nick Davis (born in 1965) is the grandson of Herman Mankiewicz on his mother's side. He is an American director, producer, and writer. In 2021, he published a biography of the Mankiewicz brothers titled *Competing with Idiots: Herman and Joe Mankiewicz, a Dual Portrait*.

BEN MANKIEWICZ

Benjamin Mankiewicz (born 1967) is the grandson of Herman Mankiewicz on his father's side. He works as an American journalist and television host on Turner Classic Movies (TCM). He is also a political commentator for The Young Turks and hosts the film podcasts The Plot Thickens and Talking Pictures.

SYDNEY STERN

Sydney Stern is an American journalist and biographer who has written for *Fortune*, *Money*, and *The New York Times*. She co-directs the Women Writing Women's Lives (WWWL) program and the biography seminar at New York University. She is the author of biographies of Gloria Steinem (1997) and the Mankiewicz brothers (2019).

STEVEN J. ROSS

Steven J. Ross is an American scholar specializing in working-class history and cinema. He has authored several major works, including *Working-Class Hollywood* and *Hitler in Los Angeles*, and has been nominated multiple times for the Pulitzer Prize. He co-founded the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities.

THOMAS DOHERTY

Thomas Patrick Doherty is an American professor at Brandeis University. He is also a writer and a Hollywood specialist, author of several works on Hollywood and politics, including *Hollywood and Hitler – 1933–1939* and *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph Breen and the Production Code Administration*.



CREW LIST

a film by **Rubika Shah**

written by **Rubika Shah, Ed Gibbs**

produced by **Bertrand Faivre**
Bettina Brokemper

director of photography **Janis Mazuch**
original score **Aisling Brouwer**