

Historia Nova

Duke Undergraduate Review

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Historia Nova

An Undergraduate Historical Review

DUKE UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2019 - VOLUME II



Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

In an effort to curate new history, Historia Nova recognizes the provocative and presents the conservative, whilst rendering traditional and emerging perspectives equally valid in historical scholarship. We strive to incite discussions across geographic and temporal boundaries, build networks between institutions across the country and the globe, and inspire younger generations of scholars to understand that history is modernity.

The present allows us to experience a walking history of tomorrow. Today's modernity features divides regarding wars, politics, climate change, poverty, and inequality, while their respective fates seemingly rest in tomorrow's history. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* suggests, "The mind is its own place and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." As we walk, we encounter numerous angles and ideologies from which we can formulate insightful, interdisciplinary narratives of new history. In the plodding ticker of modernity becoming history, we know the past and imagine the future. Historia Nova does not restrict submissions to particular topics or themes. We hope to leave room for readers themselves to draw interesting parallels between articles.

Within this edition lies reflections of the Muslim leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's redefining humanistic philosophy, Southern universities' complex relationship with regard to American slavery, and the Tatar Bolshevik Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev's ushering Muslim national communism into Central Asia, Crimea, and the Caucuses. This issue also features a work of art history that re-defines German nationalism through Max Beckmann's religious Expressionism, as well as a piece on film history that evaluates the creation of a Holocaust memory through *Schlinder's List*. Whether it is religious, nationalist, humanist, or capitalist ideologies, the papers presented in this issue demand us to hesitate in making quick conclusions. They are microhistories that when situated within the broader context of the historical period and region, reveal deeper divides, stronger bonds, and complicated realities. And in this way, each author crafts the beginning strands of reevaluating existing history and writing new history.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to both the Duke History Department and its Chairman, Dr. John J. Martin, for continually guiding the direction of the Duke History Union and Historia Nova in our efforts to steer dialogues of the historical memory into perspectives of the modern world. We would also like to recognize the *Chicago Journal of History* for helping to debut Historia Nova's design within our second edition. Furthermore, we encourage any reader to reach out, ask questions, and submit manuscripts.

Sincerely,
HN Editorial Board

Mission



Historia Nova features exceptional historical analysis from undergraduate students at institutions across the United States and around the world with the ultimate mission of showing that history can be both innovative and new. Our publication reveals the field's dynamism and challenges the ways in which history is interpreted and scholars reinterpret history. We hope you enjoy this Spring Volume. For more information about our organization at Duke University please visit our website at (<https://history.duke.edu/new-events/undergraduate>) or reach us at (dukehistorianova@gmail.com).

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Table of Contents -

- p. I **Letter from the Editors**
 Sisi Tang and Karan Thadhani
- p. 8 **Between Pan-Islamism and Indian Nationalism: The Khilafat, Humanism, and Abul Kalam Azad**
 Ahmed Elbenni, *Yale University*
- p. 20 **Between the Hammer and the Crescent: Reframing Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev's Muslim National Communism**
 Gabriel Mielke, *Georgetown University*
- p. 37 **The Peculiar Institution at Prestigious Institutions: The Chattel Principle in Higher Education, 1800-1861**
 E. Carson Eckhard, *University of Pennsylvania*
- p. 50 **"Genocide Pop": The Shortcomings of Schindler's List as a Holocaust Memory**
 Henry Hoffman, *University of Pennsylvania*
- p. 64 **Max Beckmann's Suffering: Art, Faith, and the Tortured German State in the First World War**
 Carolina Herrera, *Duke University*
- p. IV-V **Letter from the History Department Chair**
 John Jeffries Martin, *Professor of History, Chair of the Department of History - Duke University*

Between Pan-Islamism and Indian Nationalism: The Khilafat, Humanism, and Abul Kalam Azad

BY AHMED ELBENNI, YALE UNIVERSITY

Few figures in Indian history have presented an interpretive conundrum so acutely as has Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1886-1958), a Muslim scholar who spent his first adult years as a journalist and his last as Minister of Education. His complex and apparently contradictory philosophical and political stances — running the gamut from radical pan-Islamism to Muslim communalism to secular Indian nationalism — have frustrated attempts to identify him with any particular school of thought.¹ The struggle to render him intelligible has produced numerous competing theories as to the ultimate meaning of his legacy — theories typically informed by the sociopolitical context of modern-day India. Some hold Azad and the Khilafat Movement in which he played a leading role responsible for seeding the pan-Islamic ideology that informs radical Muslim terrorists today.² Others, like Ammar Anwer, view Azad as a champion of Indian nationalism and a model for reconciling Islam with the

modern secular nation-state.³ Most notable scholars of South Asian history — including I. H. Qureshi, Shuakat Ali, Peter Hardy, and Marietta Stepaniants — agree that the Khilafat Movement of 1919-1924 represented a turning point that transitioned Azad from pan-Islamic revivalism to secular Indian nationalism.⁴ But there is reason to doubt each of these aforementioned narratives, as all fail to fully grasp and account for the complex, sometimes apparently contradictory views expressed in Azad's political writings.

In this paper, I will closely examine Azad's writings in *Al-Hilal*, a newspaper typically classified as "Pan-Islamist," and Azad's leadership of the Khilafat movement to argue that, far from representing a transitional phase between pan-Islamism and secular nationalism, his actions (and words) in the Khilafat movement in fact capture the core philosophy that shaped Azad's action throughout his political career:

1 C.P. Bhambhri, "Maulana Azad's contested legacy." *Business Standard*, December 19, 2013. Accessed December 20, 2017. http://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/maulana-azad-s-contested-legacy-113121901091_1.html.

2 Uday Mahurkar, "How Pakistan would view Abul Kalam Azad and Deoband School," *DailyO - Opinion News & Analysis on Latest Breaking News India*, July 26, 2015. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/maulana-abdul-kalam-azad-partition-pakistan-deoband-indian-muslims/story/1/5223.html>.

3 Ammar Anwer, "Abul Kalam Azad's legacy provides the counter-narrative for radical Pan-Islamism." *The Nation*. Accessed December 20, 2017. <http://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2015/abul-kalam-azad-s-legacy-provides-the-counter-narrative-for-radical-pan-islamism>.

4 Ian Henderson Douglas, Gail Minault, and Christian W. Troll, *Abul Kalam Azad, an Intellectual and Religious Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 283-284.

Islamic humanism. “Pan-Islamism” and “secular nationalism” both fail to comprehensively account for Azad’s political thought, thereby establishing the necessity of an alternative means of classification. Rather, Azad’s “pan-Islamic” writings and his leadership of the Khilafat movement to illuminate a humanistic philosophy undergirded his religious and nationalist allegiances.

HISTORIOGRAPHY -

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born as Mohiuddin Ahmad in Mecca on November 18, 1888, but he spent the majority of his life in India.⁵ He first rose to prominence with the publication of his Urdu-language newspaper *Al-Hilal* in 1912, where he preached anti-British resistance and cultivated pro-Turkish support. He eventually came to play a leading role in the Khilafat movement (1919-1924). The Khilafat movement, generally remembered as a Pan-Islamic, anti-imperialist movement against the British Empire’s potential abolishment of the Ottoman Empire post-WWI, politically mobilized Muslims across India and helped foster Hindu-Muslim unity via collaboration with Mahatma Gandhi’s nationalist non-cooperation movement.⁶ However, after Gandhi halted non-cooperation in 1922, the Khilafat movement weakened and eventually collapsed in

1924 when Kemal Ataturk abolished the position of Sultan and Caliph, rendering the drive to preserve the Khilafat irrelevant. After this point, according to the popular historical narrative, Azad shed his pan-Islamist activism in favor of a more domestic and inclusive campaign for a secular Indian nationalism that encompassed Muslims and Hindus alike.⁷ He led the Indian National Congress as president in 1931, remaining prominent within the Indian nationalist movement up until his vote against partition in 1947 and his eventual appointment as the new Indian state’s first Minister of Education.⁸

The suggestion that Azad ever “embraced” secular Indian nationalism, however, is as dubious as the notion that he ever espoused pure pan-Islamism. Azad undoubtedly participated and took on leading roles in both of these movements, but rather than assuming that such support evidenced a full-fledged philosophical adoption of their principles, it may be more productive to consider that said movements manifested principles — principles, as we shall see, which were fundamentally humanistic — that simply overlapped with his own rather than totally circumscribing them. That Azad played an active role in a movement does not necessitate that he adopted wholesale that movement’s philosophical

⁵ Douglas et al, *Abul Kalam Azad*, 1-2.

⁶ M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 1-7.

⁷ Douglas et al, *Abul Kalam Azad*, 283.

⁸ Douglas et al, *Abul Kalam Azad*, 283.

commitments. Instead, Azad’s political activism must be understood in the context of his political writings, most importantly his numerous articles in his newspaper *Al-Hilal*.

Was Azad an ardent pan-Islamist, in the sense that he believed in establishing a worldwide caliphate for Muslims and cared little for India as a discrete political entity? Historical evidence suggests otherwise. As observed by Gail Minault, Azad reacted to the 1924 abolishment of the Ottoman Khilafat by advising the movement’s leaders (including himself) to focus on “matters close at home,” by which he meant the “political organization of Indian Muslims.”⁹ Minault builds on this to argue that the Khilafat movement was “based on a pan-Islamic symbol [the Ottoman Caliphate] but directed toward Muslim participation in Indian nationalism.” And indeed, Azad was very much concerned with fostering cooperative Hindu-Muslim relations for the sake of attaining Indian *swaraj* (self-rule). In the 1923 presidential address he delivered to the Indian National Congress, a time during which he politically identified as a Khilafatist, Azad emphasized the importance of inter-communal unity and Indian independence before stressing that he’d preserve Hindu-Muslim unity

at the cost of Indian independence: “Today, if an angel were to descend from the heaven and declare from the top of the Qutab Minar, that India will get Swaraj within twenty-four hours, provided she relinquishes Hindu-Muslim unity, I will relinquish Swaraj rather than give up Hindu-Muslim unity.”¹⁰ Azad understood the Khilafat movement’s agenda to be primarily national; in a 1921 article he wrote for his Urdu weekly in Calcutta, *Paigham*, he stressed that “the purpose of the Khilafat movement is Indian freedom.”¹¹ Azad’s tendency to pair calls for the preservation of the Khilafat with calls for Indian independence betrayed the movement’s domestic and nationalist character. The Khilafat movement then cannot be characterized as a purely pan-Islamic, extraterritorial movement unconcerned with Indian issues; to do so would be to fixate on the lofty pan-Islamic rhetoric while neglecting the ways that such rhetoric, with its religiously charged demonization of the British Empire, politically mobilized Muslims for anti-colonialist struggle within India. More so, the Khilafatists, in allying with Gandhi (an Indian nationalist), pushed the non-cooperation movement forward and thereby furthered the development of a nationalist Indian movement.¹² Thus the Khilafat

9 Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 204-205.

10 Saiyidain Hameed, *Maulana Azad, Islam and the Indian National Movement* (Kolkata: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 2014), 130.

11 Mushirul Hasan, *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992), 24.

12 Mushirul Hasan, *Islam, Pluralism, Nationhood: Legacy of Maulana Azad* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2014), 56.

movement, in effect if not in rhetoric, was essentially an Indian nationalist one. Should we therefore classify Azad, based on his leadership of the Khilafat movement, a nationalist?

A similar categorical insufficiency reveals itself when we look at Azad's path post-Khilafat. Even during his leadership of the Indian National Congress, Azad never abandoned the Turkish fez that marked his support for the Ottoman Caliphate.¹³ More significant still was the view expressed in his 1940 address to the Congress, where Azad declared that "I am a Muslim, [but] I have another deep realization... which is strengthened, not hindered, by the spirit of Islam. I am equally proud of the fact that I am Indian."¹⁴ Azad's reframing of Indian nationalism in this manner has important implications—it does not subordinate Islamic identity to an all-inclusive secular ideal of Indian identity, but rather suggests that Islam determined the contours of his Indian nationalism. The most decisive evidence against Azad's ostensible nationalism, though, is quite simple: he believed nationalism an inherently regressive form of communalism. Writing an article titled "Islam and Nationalism" in a rebooted *Al-Hilal* in 1927, just as he was beginning what is commonly seen as the "secular nationalist" phase of his life, Azad launched a scathing

critique on the modern conception of nationalism, arguing that it is little more than aggressive, chauvinistic, and glorified tribalism.¹⁵

Hence the contradictions that render the most common political orientations ascribed to Azad—pan-Islamism and secular nationalism—basically untenable. If Azad were indeed a pan-Islamist, why did he concern himself so deeply with Hindu-Muslim unity and Indian independence, quintessentially national problems? If he were a secular Indian nationalist, why did he couch his nationalism in religious terms and maintain a public appearance that deliberately recalled his days as a pan-Islamist leader? Clearly, the totalizing descriptions of "pan-Islamism" and "secular nationalism" do not sufficiently delineate Azad's thought.

AZAD'S HUMANISM -

Freedom and human brotherhood—the essentially humanistic character of Azad's thought is evident even from his early writings in *Al-Hilal*. Indeed, Azad's clearest articulation of his humanistic ideals came in this supposedly pan-Islamist newspaper, most notably in the aforementioned 1927 article titled "Islam and Nationalism." Even as Azad dismissed nationalism as a retrograde variant of communalism, he advanced humanism

¹³ Hasan, *Islam, pluralism, nationhood*, p. 144-146.

¹⁴ Hameed, *Maulana Azad*, 182.

¹⁵ Abūlkālām Āzād and Ali Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope: Selections from the al-Hilal of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2002), 222-251.

as a superior alternative. He first outlined a linear model of communal development through which he believed human history has progressed. The most primitive of these stages, Azad said, was “matriarchy” (bonding with one’s mother), which then advanced through to patriarchal, familial, tribal, and eventually national attachments. The higher form of social organization that proceeded from nationalism was “Islamism,” which then culminated in the recognition that humanity as a whole is one brotherhood that transcends geographic, ethnic, racial, and national lines: “humanism.”¹⁶

“Because I am an Indian, I am a Muslim, I am a human being.”¹⁷ These lines, written by Azad at the peak of the Khilafat movement in early 1922, succinctly encapsulate the philosophy of humanism that determined his lifelong personal and political principles. They neatly align with the hierarchy of human communal development that he would explicate in the 1927 article five years later: nationalism (Indian), followed by Islamism (Muslim), and culminating in humanism (human being). Azad presented an imbricated view of these identities, so that they are concentric rather than mutually exclusive.

But Azad’s humanism is not the Enlightenment-based secular humanism of the modern West; instead, it is one specifically rooted in the

traditional Islamic sources of the Quran and Prophetic Sunnah. There exists no systematized conception of humanism in the Islamic tradition in the manner of Sufism (mysticism) or Mu’tazilism (rationalist theology). Azad was not situating himself within an established school of Islamic thought so much as generating his own philosophical category. This is not to say, however, that humanistic ideas — identified here as individualism, pluralism, cosmopolitanism, equality, and most importantly freedom — have no precedent in the Islamic intellectual tradition. As observed by Goodman Evan, “Islamic humanism has a long and sometimes splendid history,” but “it does not come ready made” for modern Muslims. To that end, Evan’s penetrating study does not outline a coherent doctrine of Islamic humanism so much as identify “some of the threads of Islamic humanism in the past.”¹⁸ What the likes of historical Islamic theologians and philosophers like Miskawayah, Farabi, Avicenna, Hamadhani, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Khaldun share is not a common subscription to a well-defined school of Islamic thought, but an “ability to examine the tradition they live in, to look at it both sympathetically and critically, and to select, develop, and combine ideas that are conducive to human understanding, human growth, and human flourishing...old traditions are taken up and examined eagerly, ideas devoured

16 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 230-239.

17 Hameed, *Maulana Azad*, 114.

18 Evan Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

with gusto, made whole, made new, made over.” Such articulations were not necessarily identical, but they shared a humanistic spirit.

So, too, do we find in Azad yet another unique articulation of Islamic humanism, one emergent from and responsive to his immediate historical context. Like other Indian Muslim reformers shaped by and opposed to colonial modernity, Azad sought to harmonize Western and Islamic values. His development of an Islamically-grounded humanism anticipated that of subsequent Muslim intellectuals, on the Indian subcontinent and beyond it, who too sought to find a theologically robust basis for values of freedom and pluralism.

Note that it would be erroneous to frame Azad’s intellectual project in terms of of “construction” and “theorizing,” as doing so would suggest that Azad’s apprehension of religious truth was that of a systematic theologian. In reality, as noted by Azad’s biographer Douglas, Azad’s understanding of his faith was closer to that of a poet. I do not mean to say that Azad’s religious thinking lacked consistent, identifiable principles which lent it coherence — this essay aims to demonstrate exactly that — but rather that Azad did not approach his religion as an organized theologian or thorough philosopher, actively shaping it into an objective belief system. His Islamic

humanism arose from a more organic process, a gradual coalescence of ideas and influences and lived experiences.

In his *Al-Hilal* article, Azad declared that Islam “could not recognize any unreal relation based on race, homeland, patriotism, color, and language; it called upon human beings to accept only one relationship—the natural relationship of humanity and brotherhood.”¹⁹ To substantiate this claim, Azad quoted one of the Qur’an’s most famous verses: “[We] made you into nations and tribes that may know one another.” This verse provided a religious basis for Azad’s claim that Islam wishes to guide humanity in the direction of pluralistic reconciliation.²⁰ Azad went further by arguing for the fundamental unity of mankind on the basis of another Qur’anic chapter: “Mankind was but one nation. Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from thy Lord, their differences would have been settled between them.”²¹ It is in these verses that Azad locates inclusivity within an intellectual and spiritual space (Islam) that appears inherently exclusive, and thereby formulates a coherent construct of a humanism informed by religion. Thus Azad’s “Islamic humanism” essentially united the philosophy of classical liberalism with the conceptual framework of Islamic orthodoxy.

Azad’s humanism, though it would find potent

19 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 232-239.

20 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 232.

21 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 235.

political expression in the Khilafat years, was visible even during his writings in *Al-Hilal* between 1912 and 1916. There, as with his rhetoric during the Khilafat movement, Azad coded his calls for the anti-colonialist struggle and Indian freedom in strictly Islamic terms. In one particularly passionate article in *Al-Hilal*, Azad called upon his fellows Muslims to wage “jihad in the cause of freedom,” thus reframing the movement for Indian independence as not a secular responsibility but rather a religious duty.²² The purpose of a Muslim’s existence, Azad argued, is to be “courageous, free and independent.”²³ Note that Azad did not restrict this liberty to just India or to the Muslim community; rather, he demanded that Muslims secure freedom for both themselves *and* “bring freedom to other nations, and liberate them from fetters of oppression.”²⁴ The struggle for freedom, in other words, was pluralistic. Muslims were compelled to freedom on the basis of Islam, but the impact of their actions had to reverberate beyond the Muslim community. Through this line of thought Azad established the legitimacy of the call for Hindu-Muslim unity that would be so prominent in his Khilafat years. Such exaltation of human freedom, typical tenets of secular humanism, is reflected in his pen name, adopted when he first founded the monthly magazine *Lisan-us-Sidq* in

1903.²⁵ *Azadi* literally means “freedom” in Urdu. It was the humanistic ideals expressed in these articles that found their political outlet in the pan-Islamism of the Khilafat movement.

Azad’s leadership of the Khilafat movement both demonstrates his belief in Islamic humanism and illustrates its practical implications. The humanistic character of his pan-Islamism is evident in one of his central arguments for the Khilafat movement: the fight for religious freedom. In a 1921 speech before the Agra Khilafat Conference, Azad argued that since preserving the Khilafat was a critical religious obligation for Muslims, the British attempt to abolish it threatened Muslims’ freedom to practice their religious beliefs, thus justifying rebellion.²⁶ This is essentially the same argument by which Azad justified his call for jihad against the British in *Al-Hilal*, but repackaged: the British rob Muslims of their liberty, and therefore Muslims are religiously obliged to resist their repression. The fixation on freedom, especially religious freedom, is classically liberal and yet deeply embedded in religious tradition. More to the point, just as in *Al-Hilal* Azad had advocated for a vision of pluralistic freedom grounded in Muslims’ religious obligation to liberate others, so did here Azad encourage Muslims to unite with Hindus on the basis

22 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 95.

23 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 98

24 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*, 95-98.

25 Hameed, *Maulana Azad*, 4.

26 Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, 176.

of their shared repression.²⁷

And yet Azad's doctrine of freedom and inclusivity had its limits. His humanism was not secular but *Islamic*; as such, it did not transcend Islam but was dictated by it. Azad's Islamic humanism was not merely secular humanism shrouded in the garb of religion; rather, it espoused liberal ideals of freedom, tolerance, and universality but kept them conditional on submission to God and adherence to his Word. In his 1927 article in *Al-Hilal*, Azad cited a prophetic tradition (*hadith*) about a prayer that the Prophet would offer after the five daily prayers. This prayer, Azad noted, contains three affirmations in an ordered sequence: the first affirms the unity of God, the second affirms the Prophethood of Muhammad, and the third affirms the brotherhood of humanity.²⁸ Azad then employed this tradition in the service of a powerful argument: that the unity of mankind is affirmed directly after the *shahada*, the fundamental basis of all Islamic faith, evidences its integrity to Islamic belief. Azad is thus able to evolve, from within a specifically Islamic discursive tradition, a mandate for engaging and allying with non-Muslims. He utilizes religious doctrine to arrive at the same inclusionary ethics that secular humanism arrives at through autonomous reason. At the same time, however, he situates this

universal imperative within a hierarchy of religious obligations that privileges submission to God and his Prophet, thereby limiting its applicability to only that which is deemed acceptable by the first two.

HUMANISM'S EFFECTS ON RELIGION/ POLITICAL MOVEMENTS -

That Azad's humanism was one tempered by Islam explains its apparent contradictions. As rightly observed by Hamza Alavi, at the heart of the Khilafat movement sat a fundamental (and hypocritical) contradiction: it espoused Indian self-determination even as it sought to preserve a regime (the Ottoman Empire) that actively suppressed Arabs seeking similar self-determination.²⁹ Alavi is incorrect, however, to suggest that this contradiction evidences the incoherence of Azad's thought. Quite the contrary; Azad believed that the legitimacy of liberty was predicated on its consistency with the dictates of the Qur'an and Sunnah. To Azad, Indian Muslims were religiously obligated to push for self-rule because Muslims must oppose injustice, and the British were unjust. However, since preserving the Khilafat, according to Azad, was a religious duty equal in importance to the daily prayers,³⁰ it necessarily overrode any and all nationalistic aspirations. As such, though they might appear contradictory, Azad's

27 Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, 176.

28 Āzād and Ashraf, *The Dawn of Hope*. 235.

29 Hamza Alavi, "Contradictions of the Khilafat Movement," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 17, no. 1 (1997): 1-16.

30 Qureshi, *Pan-Islam*.

differing stances on Indian self-determination and Arab self-determination are harmonized by the logic of Islamic humanism. In the Indian context, submission to God and his Prophet permitted the application of liberal ideals; in the Arab context, it did not.

Azad's adherence to this logic is further confirmed by his support for the 1925 Saudi conquest of Mecca and Medina and subsequent establishment of a conservative, exclusionary regime of “public piety.”³¹ What at first appears to be a betrayal of Azad's liberal ideals becomes in fact an affirmation of them once Azad's support is contextualized by Islamic humanism. On the one hand, Azad had claimed in a 1920 tract called “*Khilafat aur Jazirat al-‘Arab*” that Mecca should serve as a universal “city of refuge” for the downtrodden peoples of humanity. On the other hand, since the Prophet had commanded Muslims “to leave no two faiths in the Arabian Peninsula,” Azad believed it a religious obligation to maintain a religiously exclusionary order in the Hijaz and the holy cities.³² Azad's universalism, therefore, was mediated by the particularism of his Islamic faith. This is how he could see no contradiction between simultaneously espousing inclusionary and

exclusionary politics. Thus, Azad championed human agency and religious pluralism, but only so long as it did not transgress the boundaries established by God and his Prophet.

Since Azad's brand of Islamic humanism mandates that all applications of liberal ideals take religion as a reference point, it by necessity came with in-built exclusionary mechanisms. It is these mechanisms that allowed Azad the flexibility to simultaneously call for self-rule in India and authoritarian rule in Arabia. It was through such mechanisms that, during the Khilafat movement, Azad was able to religiously justify both anti-imperialistic policy (the Prophet had called for Muslims to always fight injustice) and Hindu reconciliation (Muslims were allowed to take non-Muslims as allies, as demonstrated by the Prophet's treaty with the Jews of Medina).³³ Azad further argued for Hindu-Muslim unity on the basis of a verse in Surat Al-Mumtahanah that divided non-Muslims into two categories: those do not attack Muslims, and those who do. Since the Hindus have not attacked Indian Muslims, Azad argued, they fell into the first category and thus could enjoy an alliance with Muslims. The British, however, fell into the second category and therefore

31 John M. Willis, “Azad's Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014): 574-581.

32 Willis, John M. “Azad's Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 2014: 574-581.

33 Hameed, *Maulana Azad*, 94.

had to be treated with hostility.³⁴ Thus, again, Islamic humanism provided Azad a framework within which to simultaneously argue in favor of pluralism and exclusion.

CONCLUSION -

Interpreting Azad's later life without the lens of Islamic humanism has led historians like I. H. Qureshi to confuse his "embrace" of Indian nationalism with an abandonment of the religiously charged, pan-Islamic thought of his Khilafat years. In reality, both are different manifestations of the same Islamic humanistic principles. From writing *Al-Hilal* to leading the Indian National Congress, Azad had always maintained a consistent commitment to two central objectives: Indian independence and Hindu-Muslim unity. Both objectives manifested Azad's Islamic humanism in political form. Indian independence corresponded to Azad's drive for freedom, while Hindu-Muslim unity reflected his pluralistic vision of human brotherhood. Thus, we can see how Azad's Islamic humanism, though universal in its aspirations, developed and expressed itself in a specifically Indian context. The unique sociopolitical dynamics of said context meant that Azad's political activism would, at different times, be perceived as essentially pan-Islamist or essentially nationalist, but such labels do not capture the sophistication of his

thought. Hence why, for example, describing Azad as an Indian nationalist is erroneous; such a description assumes that nationalism was Azad's highest principle, rather than a (partial) political embodiment of his principles. Labeling Azad a nationalist confuses cause (Islamic humanism) for effect (Indian nationalism). Azad's actions were nationalistic, but the philosophical system that undergirded them was not. The flexibility that Islamic humanism afforded Azad is what has allowed Azad to appear, at different times of his life, both a pan-Islamist and a secular nationalist. He was neither.

Ultimately, understanding Azad's personal philosophy as that of Islamic humanism does more than merely harmonize the disparate threads of his political life. It illustrates the need to move beyond monolithic, undifferentiated categories like "pan-Islamism" and "secular nationalism" in order to understand not just Indian thought, but South Asian thought more broadly. The intricacy of Azad's thought reflects that of his intellectual upbringing—he was raised in a household of ultraconservative Islamic orthodoxy, obsessively read Sir Sayyid Khan's modernist and reformist writings, became an atheist, and then eventually returned to Islam.³⁵ Azad's understanding of Islamic humanism, with its blend of classical Western liberalism and traditional Islamic

³⁴ Henderson et al, *Abul Kalam Azad*, 175.

³⁵ Henderson et al, *Abul Kalam Azad*, 27-96.

dogma, arose from and as a response to those lived experiences. Slapping simplistic labels like “pan-Islamist” and “nationalist” on Azad obscures the complexity of his life and the sociopolitical milieu in which he developed and practiced his beliefs. The challenge presented by Azad’s intellectual legacy thus demonstrates the discursive limits of a political vocabulary evolved in primarily Western contexts. To render intelligible Azad and his contemporaries, historians must be willing to meet them on their own terms.

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Between the Hammer and the Crescent:

Reframing Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev's Muslim National Communism

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At first glance, the title ideology of this article seems to contradict itself in a number of ways. The universalist rhetoric of Islam which emphasizes a trans-national community of believers is apparently in conflict with the narrow identifications associated with nationalism. The internationalist analysis of most communist, Marxist, and Bolshevik thought prioritizes identifications that fall along class lines rather than those of any nation or religion. The atheistic associations of communism seem to run completely counter to the tenets and principles of Islam as a religion. However, despite these apparent contradictions, the triad of Islam, nationalism, and communism converged in the ideology of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a Turkish Bolshevik who was politically active within the former Russian Empire from 1917 until his arrest in 1923.

Sultan-Galiev selectively drew from each of these seemingly opposed ideologies in order to achieve a synthesis that formed the theoretical foundation of a broadly applicable anti-colonialism. In doing so, he presented a particular form of praxis which offered the possibility of an alliance among the colonized nations of the world aimed at dismantling

not only colonialism, but capitalism as well. From traditional Marxist thought he took away the centrality of class relations and an understanding of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism, although he would offer his own modified formula for achieving world revolution. Sultan-Galiev distilled most of his anti-colonial ideological foundation from nationalist discourse in the context of asserting Turkish identity and sovereignty against the dominating political, economic, and cultural force of Imperial Russia. He adopted from Islam a call to transnational community which could galvanize the oppressed Muslim populations of the colonized world into an alliance with the power to challenge Western hegemony. In doing so, he articulated a critique of contemporary Muslim reformers in Central Asia, the *Jadid* movement, which reflects his larger criticism of Islamic modernist reformism. Even though he is often remembered for his attempt at an ideological intervention into the colonial position of Bolshevism, he failed to make a significant impact on Marxist thought in the long term. Rather, it has been his radical position vis-à-vis Islamic reformism which proved to be influential regarding the thought of later Muslim

leaders such as Ahmed Ben Bella and Muammar Qaddafi.

THE LIFE OF MIRSAID SULTAN-GALIEV -

Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev was born in 1892 in the village of Elembet'evo, a part of the Ufa *guberniya* of the Russian Empire, to a family of mixed class origins. His father was a *mishar*, a member of a group from the Volga Tatar peasant class, while his mother was the daughter of a Tatar nobleman. According to his autobiography, his family would often visit the estate of his maternal grandfather, where the social distinctions between classes found realization in his being bullied by his cousins to the point that their jokes "aroused in the depths of my childish soul a deep hatred toward all these jokers... Thus, the farmstead of my grandfather was for me the first and most realistic revolutionary school, cultivating in me a feeling of class hatred".¹ This personal experience of class oppression may have significantly contributed to his eventual membership in the Bolshevik party for he seems to have not been immersed in the crucible of ideological struggle that saw the Bolsheviks distinguish themselves from the Mensheviks and other Russian socialists before 1917. His early political thought was more likely influenced by his father's position as a school teacher and the latter's use of

Ismail Gasprinski's *uṣūl al-jadīd*.

Gasprinski has been hailed as one of the leading figures in the *jadid* intellectual movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term *jadidism* is used to describe a collection of reform-oriented, Islamic modernist intellectual currents which arose in the context of the Russian imperial domination of the Muslim populations of Central Asia, Crimea, and the Caucasus. Alexandre Bennigsen describes the basic tenets of *jadidism* as the "linguistic, educational, political, and cultural modernisation of Muslim society."² With this goal in mind, Gasprinski developed a method of teaching which sought to break from the pedagogical traditions of the *mekteb* schools, and plot a new cultural and political future for the Muslim Turks of the Russian Empire. Gasprinski and *jadidism* will be addressed in further depth later in this work, for now it is sufficient to note the influence that *jadidism* had on the educational development of Sultan-Galiev. As a result of his father's *jadidist* teaching techniques Sultan-Galiev was imbued with analytical critical thinking skills and a love of Russian literature which saw him graduate from the Kazan Tatar Teachers' School in 1911. From there he began a career in journalism taking him to Baku where "some of

1 Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, *Izbrannye Trudy*, ed. I. G. Gizzatullin and D. R. Sharafutdinov (Kazan, Izd-vo Gasyr', reprinted in Baker, 1998), 592.

2 Alexandre Bennigsen, *Ismail Bey Gasprinski (Gaspraly) and Origins of the Jadid Movement in Russia* (Oxford: The Society for Central Asian Studies, 1985), Reprint series no. 6.

his earliest contributions to the Muslim press were directed against customary practices that he thought repugnant to modern Muslim culture, such as the *ḥudūd* punishments for the offence of *zina*.³ This brings to light a connection between Sultan-Galiev’s *jadidist* education and his later political positions, particularly in regard to Muslim Turkish society. Combined with his experiences of class-differentiated discrimination, his *jadidist* educational background seems to foreshadow the ideological positions which he would later advocate.

Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev joined the Bolshevik party on 15 July, 1917, after the February Revolution, but importantly before the October Revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power. His primary reason for joining the Bolsheviks, instead of one of the other left-wing parties active at the imperial periphery, was articulated in terms of the Bolshevik commitments to the crumbling empire’s rising national movements, specifically the Muslim ones:

Only they stopped the war. Only they are striving to transfer the nationalities’ fates into their own hands. Only they revealed who started the world war. What does not lead me to them? They also declared war on English imperialism, which oppresses India, Egypt, Afghanistan, Persia and Arabia. They are also the ones who raised arms against French

imperialism, which enslaves Morocco, Algiers, and other Arab states of Africa. How could I not go to them? You see, they proclaimed the words, which have never been voiced in the history of the Russian state. Appealing to all Muslims of Russia and the East, they announced that Istanbul must be in Muslims’ hands.⁴

While this explanation for his support of the Bolsheviks might at first seem to point towards an insincere belief in the validity of Bolshevism, it actually underlines Sultan-Galiev’s entire understanding of socialist revolution. As will be discussed in more depth later, for Sultan-Galiev a successful socialist revolution is inconceivable without first the end of Western imperialism over the Muslim peoples of the East. Thus, his support of the Bolsheviks was tied to their professed anti-imperialist rhetoric in general, and specifically their promises to the Turkish Muslims of Russia, as expressed in Lenin’s *The Eastern Question*. This support transformed into Sultan-Galiev’s rapid rise through the Bolshevik ranks to positions of importance, particularly in the *Sovnarkom*, the new Soviet administrative body headed by Joseph Stalin and tasked with overseeing issues concerning Russia’s non-Russian nationalities. Over time, Sultan-Galiev was particularly distinguished by his exceptional

3 Vanja Hamzić, “Mir-Said Sultan-Galiev and the idea of Muslim Marxism: empire, Third World(s) and praxis,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 11 (Sept. 2016): 2049.

4 Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, “The Tatars and the October Revolution,” *Žizn’ nacional’nostej*, 38 no. 46 (1921), reprinted in Bennigsen and Wimbush, op. cit., 138.

service in the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. He cites in “The Tatars and the October Revolution” the (perhaps inflated) role played by revolutionary Muslim Turks on behalf of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War reserving for himself a central role in the Red victory.⁵ Guadagnolo asserts that in his autobiography Sultan-Galiev focuses “on how he spread Bolshevik ideals not just among Tatars, but also throughout Central Asia. Sultan-Galiev suggested that, without his role as a mediator between Moscow and the diverse nationalities of the East, Soviet power might have collapsed.”⁶ Regardless of the validity of such a claim, it is clear that his experience in the Red Army helped to shape his ideological developments. He would go on to argue for the importance of a revolutionary army in developing cadres and spreading Marxist ideas. His time involved in the Red Army on the Russian periphery aided in his climb through the Bolshevik ranks into a position in the *Sovnarkom* as well as in the process of developing and articulating a distinctly Muslim, nationalist variety of communism. However, his honeymoon with the Soviet establishment would not last much longer than the Civil War itself.

His disagreement with Stalin over the integration of national political units into the emerging Soviet Union as well as his attempts to reach out

to the anti-Soviet Turkish Basmachi rebels which would see him arrested on 4 May 1923.⁷ This arrest signaled Sultan-Galiev’s political downfall, ending his attempts to organize a revolutionary anti-colonial movement outside the purview of the Comintern. He would be released after having his position in the Party stripped, but would be arrested, released, re-arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed in 1940. His dream of a united front of colonized Muslim nations fighting to simultaneously end capitalism and colonialism was seemingly relegated to the dustbin of history.

This ideological dream was the product of at least two distinct, but interrelated aspects of Sultan-Galiev’s life. His willingness to accept Bolshevism was influenced by his experiences of class antagonisms growing up as the son of a member of the peasant class. Additionally, his early exposure to and adoption of the *uṣūl al-jadīd* as a pedagogical method and *jadidism* more broadly shaped both his understanding of Islam as a social and cultural force as well as his pro-Turkic nationalist sentiments.

If Sultan-Galievism (as his enemies within the Russian Communist Party would come to call it) had no lasting ideological impact, than he would not have been referenced by Maxime Rodinson as a ‘forgotten

5 Sultan-Galiev, “The Tatars,” 138.

6 Gary Guadagnolo, “‘Who Am I’: Revolutionary Narratives and the Production of the Minority Self in the Early Soviet Era,” *Region* 2, no. 1 (2013): 74-76.

7 Mark R. Baker, “Did He Really Do It? Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, Party Disloyalty, and the 1923 Affair,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 4 (April 2014): 590-612.

precursor⁸ or be cited by Ahmed Ben Bella as an inspiration.⁹ The remainder of this article is dedicated to (1) further establishing the wider political and social context in which Sultan-Galiev developed his understanding of a Muslim national communism, (2) performing a close reading of his works (only those translated into English) in order to offer a detailed and comprehensive picture of this ideology, and (3) reframe this ideology as also a critique of radical *jadidism*, rather than merely as an intervention into Marxist theory.

A CONTEXT OF IDEOLOGICAL CONFUSION:

BAKU -

Though the contours of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev’s life were described in the previous section, I have deemed it necessary to briefly discuss the context of simultaneous revolutionary upheaval, nationalist agitation, and Islamic uncertainty that characterized the predominantly Muslim regions of the former Russian Empire. To accomplish this, I draw upon the picture offered by Michael G. Smith in his description of the city of Baku from 1917-1920. In his analysis, the tumultuous political situation in Baku culminated in a murderous, politically-motivated shooting at the New Light Cafe in the center of the city between Bolshevik supporters and an associate of

the less radical Muslim socialist party, the Musavat.¹⁰ However, this picture is muddled by the exact ideological classification of this party, were they truly socialists? Or were they pan-Islamists? Or even were they Azerbaijani Turkish nationalists? The answers lie in a mixture of all three of these, a similar ideological combination on behalf of which Sultan-Galiev himself would come to advocate.

The Musavat Party can be seen as socialist in two primary ways: their proposed economic and labor program and their alliance with the Bolsheviks. With regard to labor policies, they proposed moderate socialist demands such as the eight-hour-work-day, six-day-work-week, abolition of child labor, and limited land redistribution.¹¹ In articulating these demands they drew from not only traditional theories of European-style social democracy, but also from the Qur’an and the ultimate mission of shari’a – to establish justice. This imparted a distinctly Islamic rhetoric to their moderate socialism; the Musavat saw itself as the political party fighting on behalf of the poor, specifically, the Muslim poor and working class of Azerbaijan. Along with their proposed socialistic economic reforms, the Musavat allied itself with the Bolsheviks in a tactical way that revealed the party’s relative political impotence as well as its particularly

8 Maxime Rodinson and Gilbert Achcar, *Marxism and the Muslim World* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

9 Information on Ahmed Ben Bella can be found in *Newsweek*, 13 January 1964, p. 28.

10 Michael G Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumour: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narratives of the Russian Revolution in Baku, 1917-20,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, no. 2 (2001): 211-220.

11 Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumor,” 218.

strategic nationalism. In the aftermath of the events in February 1917 the Bolsheviks and the Musavat were both politically outmaneuvered in the Baku Soviet by the combined forces of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) and the Mensheviks, who benefited from strong support among the non-Muslim working class population of the city. Together, the Musavat and Bolsheviks spearheaded a number of coordinated strike actions as late as October 1917 in an effort to force the primarily Menshevik and SR Baku Soviet into following the example of the October Revolution in Petrograd.¹² Additionally, in a way that reflects Sultan-Galiev's own reasoning, the Musavat leaders saw in the Bolsheviks the best option for achieving autonomy for Russia's Muslim peoples. Smith argues:

During the summer and autumn of 1917, the Bolsheviks appreciated these platforms and realities [of the Musavatists], mostly out of necessity arising from their own isolation and vulnerability in Baku politics. So they mounted a tactical alliance with the Musavatists, who in turn looked to the Bolsheviks as their former comrades in the workers' struggles between 1904 and 1907, as well as the least chauvinistic of all the social democrats of Baku. Their political interests united in a joint programme for labour reform, for federal autonomy and national self-determination, and for a quick and just conclusion of the war.¹³

By noting the Musavat's belief in the relatively

low level of national chauvinism on the part of the Bolsheviks when compared to the other socialist parties active in Baku, Smith suggests that the party followed the logic laid out by Sultan-Galiev. Namely, that the Bolsheviks' radical promises towards the nationalities might not be fully realizable, but their position on national self-determination offered the most amenable option laid out by the major political parties. However, this alliance built upon combatting mutual rivals and a shared, but vague policy platform would crumble amid the roiling sectarian and political violence of Baku in the Civil War.

The relatively shaky foundations upon which the Musavat-Bolshevik alliance was built were undermined by politically and religiously-differentiated violence at the local level. This violence, comprising both that done by Russian and Armenian militias against Azerbaijani Muslims as well as the actions of the so-called Turkish 'Savage Division' against the Christian residents of Baku, arose in the context of simultaneous imperial collapse and military assertion as illustrated by Smith.¹⁴ He writes that "[t]he Transcaucasus ... was just then emerging from a century of Russian colonial subjugation, a regime of sustained censorship, civic alienation and ethnic rivalry. But the region was also now torn between several empires in collapse (the Russian, Ottoman and

¹² Smith, "Anatomy of a Rumor," 221.

¹³ Smith, "Anatomy of a Rumor," 220.

¹⁴ Smith, "Anatomy of a Rumor," 220-221.

British) and their armies in the field, compounding the absence of a healthy civil society with the vagaries of war and deprivation.”¹⁵ This situation of fluid political authority and numerous armed people able to exercise that authority to the perceived detriment of other ethnically- or religiously-defined populations resulted in cycles of local violence and reprisals. These in turn helped to crystalize social cleavages within Azerbaijani society. In this context of nationally- and religiously-coded violence, the Islamic and nationalist elements of the Musavat program began to rise to prominence specifically because of their divergence from those of the Bolsheviks and other parties dominated by ethnic Great Russians. They split with the Bolsheviks during the bloody March Events which saw serious fighting between Muslims and Christians in Baku itself, a division that grew more severe as the Musavat began to involve itself in the political project of building the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR).¹⁶ As this occurred, the nationalistic aspect of the Musavatists’ understanding of socialism began to overshadow their previous socialist credentials leading to the ultimate conquest of Baku and the embryonic ADR by the Red Army in the Spring of 1920. Regardless of past cooperation and degrees of ideological overlap between the two parties, the annals of Soviet history would remember the Musavat

as reactionary pan-Islamists and petty nationalists who betrayed the revolution and were subsequently punished for it. This process foreshadowed the fate that would be eventually experienced by Sultan-Galiev himself.

Leaving aside the parallels between Sultan-Galiev’s fate and that of the Musavat and their amalgamated but fluid ideology of Muslim Turkish communism, the example of Baku illustrates well the tumultuous and ever-changing political and social situations facing Muslim national communists. Their geographic position, often along the borderlands of the former Russian Empire, placed them not only in situations of extreme violence, famine, and civil disorder, but in the path of the military forces fighting on behalf of ideological foes of the Civil War. Thus they did not have the opportunity to develop their ideologies outside of a context of local violence that was also laden with global political significance. The stakes of the war in Baku, and throughout the Muslim Russian periphery, were not merely the establishment of local or regional political authorities, grander ideological battles were being waged as well. They carried with them imperatives of military victory that polarized the local political actors into one of two camps: the Reds or the Whites. The ADR and the Musavat experienced firsthand the impossibility

15 Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumor,” 222.

16 Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumor,” 227-229.

of steering a middle path between the forces of revolution on one hand, and those of the reaction on the other.

This polarized atmosphere of political and social violence undoubtedly shaped the political thought of Sultan-Galiev. As much as he was influenced by his upbringing and education, as discussed in the previous section, he was also affected by the context of violence, disorder, and inter-party political competition that characterized the period of the Civil War. Especially because of his active and noted participation in the Bolshevik war effort, Sultan-Galiev's Muslim Turkish nationalist communism was imbued with bellicose qualities: an appreciation of a revolutionary role for the Red Army, and an understanding of total societal mobilization against colonialism and capitalism. This point will be further elaborated upon in my discussion of Sultan-Galiev's critiques of *jadid* radicalism. Next, I will undertake a deep reading of three of Sultan-Galiev's articles in order to tease out a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of his amalgamated ideology.

HOLY WAR OR CLASS WAR: A CLOSE READING OF SULTAN-GALIEV'S MUSLIM NATIONAL COMMUNISM -

Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev undertook to develop his own understanding of Marxism, particularly in relation to the concept of an international proletariat and the relationship between imperialism and capitalism, which provides the foundation upon

which the rest of his ideology rests. His analysis of imperialism as a phenomenon of capitalism explicitly reveals the reversed relationship between the proletariat of the Western industrialized countries and their capacity for revolutionary action. Orthodox Marxist theory posits that the revolutionary potential of a given population should be tied to the level of capitalist development in their country. Therefore, the most industrialized societies, those with large populations of urban workers found in the time of Sultan-Galiev in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States, would offer the most advantageous conditions for revolution. Sultan-Galiev turns this thesis on its head arguing rather that the urban industrial proletariats of the West are less likely to carry out a revolution than the doubly-oppressed proletariats of the colonized nations. He cites both contemporary European socialist failures, specifically the German Revolution of 1919, as well as theoretical explanations to support this claim:

[O]ur actions began to take a more or less defined character only from the moment of the disasters of the socialist revolution in the West, when the very development of events (the defeat of the Spartakists in Germany, the failure of the general strike protesting against intervention in Russian affairs, and the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic) compelled us to accept the simple truth that, without the participation of the East, it is impossible for us to achieve the international socialist

revolution.¹⁷

Thus for Sultan-Galiev the failure of the revolutionary efforts of the European working class is proof enough that the industrial proletariat of the West on its own does not have the capacity to carry out a successful socialist revolution. He supports this historical evidence with the some speculation, saying that “[a]s long as international imperialism, represented by the Entente, dominates the East, where it is the absolute master of all natural wealth, then so long is it guaranteed of a successful outcome in all its clashes in the economic field with the working masses of the home countries, for it can always ‘shut their mouths’ by satisfying their economic demands.”¹⁸ In this way, the oppressed proletariat of the East is not only exploited for the profit of the Western bourgeoisie, but also to provide the material incentives with which the Western proletariat is bribed to give up their own efforts at revolution. Thus, Sultan-Galiev comes to the conclusion that international social revolution cannot come about without first the end of imperialism, brought about by a revolutionary movement of colonial peoples.

Sultan-Galiev’s characterization of colonized peoples and nations as fundamentally proletarian in nature is a striking conclusion, especially given his

experiences with classism within his own Muslim Turkish extended family. Taking into account only his personal experience, one might be inclined to assume that Sultan-Galiev knew better than most the deep class divisions of Muslim society. He does in fact do so, but only after implying that the colonized nations of the world are unitary to the degree that they are, at the national level, oppressed and exploited by the Western bourgeoisie. He states that “[e]xamining the East from the socioeconomic point of view, we see that almost all of it is the object of exploitation by West European capital.”¹⁹ At the surface this might not seem to have controversial implications, at least from a Marxist point of view, however, the seemingly nonchalance of this sentence belies its radical reinterpretation of Marxism. For in emphasizing that *all* of the East is exploited by Western capital, Sultan-Galiev is intentionally overshadowing the class distinctions within societies victimized by Western imperialism in order to focus on their shared colonial status. Underlying this assertion of the proletarian nature of the colonized East is his application of Marxist class analysis to nations. In the same way that individuals within capitalist societies exist in two separate classes, one the exploiter (bourgeoisie) and the other the exploited (proletariat), to Sultan-Galiev,

17 Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, “The Social Revolution and the East,” *Žizn’ nacional’nostej* 38, no. 46 (1919), 133. Reprinted in Ben-nigsen and Wimbush, op. cit.

18 Sultan-Galiev, “The Social Revolution,” 134.

19 Sultan-Galiev, “The Social Revolution,” 135.

nations belong to one of two separate classes, the colonizers and the colonized. Thus, based on their shared status as colonized, rather than colonizers, the oppressed nations of the East have a common position from which they can unite across divisions of nationality or language to combat Western imperialism.

This question of national variety and difference seems to loom large in the background of Sultan-Galiev's articles, for he never explicitly cites the Turks of Russia as having any inherent, traditionally nationalistic qualities which make them best suited for carrying out Muslim national communism. However, he does reference the apparent coincidence of the Turks of Russia being at the correct stage of cultural development to take up the responsibility of carrying the social revolution into the Eastern periphery of Russia.²⁰ Thus at first Sultan-Galiev's Turkish nationalism seems to primarily be cultural, however, he also firmly believes in the necessity of a sovereign political entity to represent the Turks of Russia within the Soviet Union. He argues that "it would be appropriate to say a few words about the importance of the Tatar Republic in the development of the social revolution in the East, for the Tatar factor was enormously important. All the cultural forces forged and shaped during this period in Tatarstan

would become, in the future, the seeds of cultural development in our still underdeveloped eastern territories."²¹ In this way he emphasizes, potentially to the degree of unbridled praise, the role played by Muslim Turkish communists in bringing the revolution to the rest of Central Asia with the purpose of defending the right to sovereignty for Soviet Turks. He more explicitly defends Soviet Turkish sovereignty in a disagreement with Stalin while working in the *Sovnarkom* in which he compares the proposed (eventually realized) plan to integrate Turkestan into the Soviet Union under the administration of the *Sovnarkom* rather than as an independent national unit as "a division into bastards and true sons" in which Turkestan was being treated as a bastard of the October Revolution.²² Sultan-Galiev so thoroughly believed in the importance of Turkish sovereignty within the Soviet Union that he staked out a potentially controversial position vis-a-vis his superior in the Party and *Sovnarkom* administration, Stalin.

Though his Turkish nationalism was both cultural and political, Sultan-Galiev never seemed to adhere to the more narrow and exclusive conceptions of the Turkish nation. As the product of *jadidism* he was familiar with the efforts to construct a new Turkish lingua franca that could connect the Turkic-speaking peoples of what was then the Russian

20 Sultan-Galiev, "The Tatars," 139-140.

21 Sultan-Galiev, "The Tatars," 142.

22 Baker, "Did He Really Do It?," 597.

Empire. Though he was a Volga Tatar himself, he refrained from attacking his fellow Turks, whether Azerbaijani, Bashkir, or Crimean, in line with narrowly nationalist views. Rather, he seems to have understood his nationalism as a way to trace similarities between the oppressed, colonized nations of the East, in contrast to Western imperialists. Hence why he framed revolutionary Tatars as the vital link between the revolution in Moscow and Kazan and its sibling process in Bukhara rather than as potential revolutionary gatekeepers. For Sultan-Galiev, identification with the Turkish Muslims of Russia meant an identification with all of the oppressed and colonized nations of the East, for their similarities arose from their shared status as victims of colonization. He ascribed to an expansive, rather than exclusive, understanding of nationalism, one which was influenced by his own revision of Marxist class analysis as applied to the status of nations. This method of understanding would be repeated in his understanding of Islam.

Sultan-Galiev understands Islam as a social system of cultural and political values that can accommodate a variety of different governing systems, even Soviet socialism, not as an independently existing ideology. This point is revealed most clearly in his article “The Methods of Antireligious

Propaganda among the Muslims,” in which he criticizes the current program of Bolshevik atheist agitation and propaganda while outlining his proposed plan for improving such efforts within the Muslim communities of the newly integrated Soviet Union. Here he argues that:

The essential factor which determines the position of Islam is its youthfulness. Of all the ‘great religions’ of the world, Islam is the youngest and therefore the most solid and the strongest as far as influence is concerned. All serious European Islamicists have recognized this fact. Islam has best preserved social and political elements, whereas the other religions emphasize above all ethnic and religious elements. Muslim law – the Shariy’at – is a code of law and of judicial norms that regulates all aspects of the earthly life of the believer. In it we find directions on how to pray, how to conduct oneself at work, in society, in the family, and in everyday life, down to the smallest detail. Moreover, many of its prescriptions have a clear-cut, positive character.²³

In this passage he focuses upon the influence and power which Islam exercises over its adherents and constructs Islam as an all-encompassing system of values within which there are prescribed behaviors for nearly any social situation. He recognizes that Islam is more than what in the West is classified as religion; it is a complex and influential system of

23 Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, “The Methods of Antireligious Propaganda among the Muslims,” *Žizn’ nacional’nostej* 19 no. 127 (1921), 146. Reprinted in Bennigsen and Wimbush.

beliefs that extend into political life. Additionally, he seems to imply that as long as a system of government can accommodate the prescriptions of Islamic law (*shari'a*), then that form of government, maybe even Soviet socialism, could successfully govern large Muslim populations. He hints toward this at the end of the excerpt by mentioning, in passing, the “positive character” of many Islamic prescriptions, a point upon which he expands in the following paragraph by recalling “...the duty of parents to educate their children until they come of age; the institution of civil marriage; the absence of private property in lands, waters, and forests ... the prohibition of sorcery, games of chance, luxury, extravagance, jewelry in gold and silk clothing ... the establishment of a detailed and progressive system of taxes on produce and on goods (*Zakat*, *ushr*, and so on).”²⁴ Sultan-Galiev is listing these Islamic duties in order to illustrate the potential compatibility of most Islamic law with the political program of the Communist Party. While he recognizes the penetrating influence of Islamic law on Muslim Turkish society, he also argues that these laws are compatible with the imagined Soviet society in a way that allows them their Islamic social values and cultural heritage while establishing the dominance of atheistic communism. To Sultan-Galiev, the more

important component of Islam is its trans-national call to solidarity among oppressed peoples.

To Sultan-Galiev, the thread which connects the diverse communities of Muslims across the world together was their shared experience of colonialism and imperialist domination. In addition to the original solidarity between Muslim nations built upon a foundation of shared social and political values was added a shared experience of oppression and exploitation by Western imperialists who, beginning in the Crusades, Sultan-Galiev argues, conducted a concerted campaign of aggression and conquest against the Muslim East.²⁵ A development which “has profoundly marked the religion of the Muslims,” to the point that they saw it as “a battle against Islam as a whole.”²⁶ In Sultan-Galiev’s analysis this resulted in the fact that “in the eyes of Muslims, the Muslim world forms an indivisible whole, without distinction, nationality, or tribe.”²⁷ However much we might immediately refute such claims of inherent intra-Muslim solidarity, this understanding of Islam as constituting a relationship that connects all Muslims together in an anti-colonial alliance is centrally important to Sultan-Galiev’s ideology. Indeed, it also parallels his conceptions of nationalism, in which the tendencies of international solidarity among

24 Sultan-Galiev, “Methods of Antireligious Propaganda,” 146.

25 Sultan-Galiev, “Methods of Antireligious Propaganda,” 147.

26 Sultan-Galiev, “Methods of Antireligious Propaganda,” 147.

27 Sultan-Galiev, “Methods of Antireligious Propaganda,” 147.

oppressed nations overshadows potential conflicts among and between those colonized peoples. In this, he integrates these specific and universalist understandings of both nationalism and Islam with his inversion of traditional Marxist theory in order to construct a new, synthetic proposal for anti-capitalist world revolution. One which constitutes an assault of the united proletariats of the colonized East against Western imperialism in tandem with the struggle of the industrial proletariat of the West in order to end both colonialism and capitalism. This thesis has been interpreted as primarily a critique of a contemporary Soviet doctrine which emphasized the necessity of spreading the socialist revolution westwards to overthrow the Western bourgeoisie and carry out a world social revolution. While this is undoubtedly a correct interpretation, I assert that in Sultan-Galiev’s Muslim national communism is a militant intervention into *jadidist* thought concerning correct transformative political praxis.

REFRAMING SULTAN-GALIEV’S MUSLIM NATIONAL COMMUNISM: MILITANT MUSLIM PRAXIS -

Against the prevailing narrative that Sultan-Galiev’s ideology was primarily an attempt to change the development of Marxist, even specifically Marxist-Leninist thought, I argue that he also offers a stirring critique of *jadidism*. He does this implicitly, for indeed

his primary audience, at least in the writings which are available and translated for English-speaking scholars, is the group of already involved and committed Bolshevik activists and Party members. Thus a critique of *jadidism* would seem to be out-of-place in an article concerning Bolshevik affairs. However, Sultan-Galiev understood the hold that *jadidist* thought still had on Muslim intellectuals in Russia and subsequently knew that he had to offer a demonstrable alternative to it. He did so by offering a more militant and relevant praxis than the *jadidists* could. For some of them began to adopt a certain anti-imperialist nature in the aftermath of the February Revolution which brought this particular *jadidism* closer to the Russian radical left, including the Bolsheviks. This phenomenon is described by Adeeb Khalid with regard to the ideological evolution of Abdurrauf Fitrat. His pre-revolutionary *jadidism*, something that could have been recognizable to Gasprinski, was shaped by the events of the First World War and Russian Revolution into a less spiritual, more politically anti-imperialist ideology.²⁸ Thus *jadidism* broadly shifted away from only critiquing Muslim society and supporting cultural reform and began to offer prescriptions for national sovereignty as well. However, this rhetorical and ideological shift was not accompanied by a complementary shift in *jadidist* praxis which is the

28 Adeeb Khalid, “Nationalizing the Revolution in Central Asia,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 151-154.

intervention that Sultan-Galiev makes.

Jadidists of all varieties fundamentally understood the problems of their societies in social and cultural terms of reference and, as a result, their prescribed solutions to these problems lie exclusively in the field of education and cultural production. “The *Jadids* had seen the path to salvation to lie through enlightenment, education, and moral rectitude, things that only a cultural elite could provide. This basic prescription did not change after 1917.”²⁹ This was the foundation of *jadidist* praxis, one which prevented them from properly mobilizing upon their shift toward anti-imperialist rhetoric. The injustices of imperialism, material and political as they were, might have demanded similarly robust responses in the form of social movements and military action in the colonized world. Labor strikes, civil disobedience, and even armed insurrection might seem to be proper responses to economically exploitative and violently dominant Western imperialism imposed upon the Muslim East. However, the *jadidists* never innovated their praxis, that of educational reform and societal moral reform, into a force that could claim to combat the material menace of Western imperialism. Against this rhetoric of *jadidist* anti-imperialism without sufficiently material solutions, Sultan-Galiev offers a visionary praxis of militant confrontation with the forces of

Western imperialism writ large.

Sultan-Galiev, throughout his writings, emphasizes the revolutionary efficacy of the Red Army, particularly the Muslim elements of it. In doing so, he is proposing a potential praxis of Muslim anti-imperialist revolutionaries: the establishment of the Muslim Red Army that could carry out three essential roles: educating revolutionary activists, disseminating propaganda, and militarily combating the forces of reaction and imperialism if necessary. For example, Sultan-Galiev writes that Muslim commissars:

...accomplished an immense amount of work on the spot, especially in the areas of agitation, propaganda, and cultural activities. From another angle, work accomplished by the Military College was highly significant. It was aimed in two directions: first, the mobilization of the Tatars in the Red Army and their political education; second, the formation of Red military leaders and of political activists chosen from among the workers and poor peasants.³⁰

In emphasizing the role played by these militant Muslim communists Sultan-Galiev is not only defending them to an audience of Great Russian Bolshevik comrades, but he is also offering an alternative, militant praxis to that offered by education-focused *jadidists*. He further stresses the vital role carried out by the “Tatar combatants of the Red Army” who became “the pioneers of social

29 Khalid, “Nationalizing the Revolution,” 153.

30 Sultan-Galiev, “The Tatars,” 142.

revolution in the East by carrying the red flag of class struggle to the distant *kishlaks* (villages) of Central Asia, to *the yurts* of Siberia, and to the *auls* of the Caucasus.”³¹ This central focus on the Red Army and its utility as a driving force behind the revolution should come as no surprise given the life experiences of Sultan-Galiev and the already-discussed violently tumultuous context in which he was writing. He held an active role in facilitating the Red Army’s campaign in the East during the Civil War and would have not only been familiar with Muslim participation in the army, but he might have come away from those experiences having learned that military force is the best way to combat counter-revolution. From these writings and others of Sultan-Galiev’s not yet available in English, Matthieu Renault argues that he advocated for something like an “‘Oriental Proletarian Red Army’ as a genuine organized, hierarchical and highly politicized ‘social class,’ capable of replacing the missing indigenous proletariat as the driving revolutionary force.”³² This was a significant departure from the traditional praxis of the *jadidists*, and, in fact, served as an ultimate critique leveled against them. For even though some of the them began to include anti-imperialist rhetoric into their versions

of *jadidism*, they nevertheless failed to adapt their proposed methods of social change to adapt to the violent conditions of their time. This is my reframing of Sultan-Galiev’s thought, namely that while he was critiquing the Western chauvinistic tendencies of the Bolsheviks, he also leveled a critique against *jadidism* with regard to their apparently insufficient political praxis in confronting the interrelated systems of capitalism and imperialism.

The legacies of this specific critique, and Sultan-Galiev’s three-part, amalgamated political ideology in general, are difficult to parse out because of his partial erasure from the Soviet historical record as well as his early retirement from political affairs. However, it can be said that Bennigsen claims that Sultan-Galiev’s Muslim National Communism was introduced to the first president of the independent Algeria, Ahmed Ben Bella.³³ It might be likely that Ben Bella, Muammar Gaddafi, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and other Muslim socialist leaders and ideologues might have been influenced by Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev and the general ideological milieu consisting of mixtures of Islam, nationalism, and communism. However, there are only the most tenuous of direct linkages between Sultan-Galiev and these later

31 Sultan-Galiev, “The Tatars,” 143.

32 Matthieu Renault, “The Idea of Muslim National Communism: On Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/03/23/the-idea-of-muslim-national-communism-on-mirsaid-sultan-galiev/>.

33 Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush. *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: a Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 112.

leaders and practitioners. He may be the “Forgotten Precursor” as dubbed by Rodinson,³⁴ or he may have just been forgotten as one of the major figures in an ideological tradition that eventually reemerged during the period of decolonization.

CONCLUSION -

Sultan-Galiev produced the most coherent articulation of Muslim National Communism at his time, combining a reinterpretation of Marxism that emphasized the revolutionary subjectivity of non-industrial, colonized proletariats with understandings of both Turkish nationalism and Islam, seeing them as lines of connection reaching across nations. He rejected narrow and divisive understandings of both nationalism and Islam in order to embrace what he thought was anti-imperialist solidarity among oppressed nations. Sultan-Galiev came to this ideological thesis as a result of the contours of his own life as well as the turbulent and violent period of instability and violence in which he lived. While most scholars have remembered Sultan-Galiev for his resistance to Eurocentric Marxist analysis and intervention into communist anti-imperialism, he also offered a praxis-focused critique of contemporary *jadidism*, seeing it as insufficient to address the material and political problems facing Russia’s Muslims. Rather, he put forward the ideas of a revolutionary, anti-imperial army which could

advance the cause of revolution more effectively than education alone could. In this way, he foreshadowed the theories of Mao Tse-Tung and other revolutionary leaders of the Global South.

34 Rodinson and Achcar, *Marxism*.

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The Peculiar Institution at Prestigious Institutions: The Chattel Principle in Higher Education, 1800-1861

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*“With tears I leave these Academic bowers
And cease to cull the scientific flowers
With tears I hail the fair succeeding train
And take my exit with a breast of pain”*

- **George Moses Horton, from “The Pleasures of a College Life” (1836)**¹

In February of 1862, twenty-six senators convened in Richmond, Virginia for the first of four sessions of the Confederate States Congress. Among them were politicians, planters, former U.S. senators and judges. Although they hailed from across the American South, the majority of the men who served in the Confederate Senate shared a distinct and rare privilege: a college education. As the chief policymakers of the nascent Confederacy, these educated men relied heavily on their academic backgrounds to create and carry out legislation to enshrine white supremacy and preserve the southern “right” to slavery, which served as the backbone of the new nation’s economy. Likewise, the alma maters of the Confederate legislators largely depended on

the practice of slavery to function as prestigious academic centers. Institutions of higher learning in the antebellum South came to exemplify the chattel principle, as universities throughout the region relied on slave labor and lives to bolster their financial and academic standing. The master-slave relationship as it existed on the campuses of the antebellum South’s elite institutions illustrated both the economic dependency on slavery and the relationships forged between enslaved people and the institutions for which they labored. Enslaved people proximate to institutions of higher learning typically exercised greater autonomy than their plantation-confined counterparts. However, the relative autonomy granted to university-associated slaves often came at the price of heavy dependence on the institution itself.²

Thus far, the vast majority of historiography on slavery focuses either on the plantation or the slave pen.³ The scholarship on the presence of slavery

1 George Moses Horton, “The Pleasures of a College Life,” Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1836, accessed November 22, 2017, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3393>.

2 Throughout this paper, I use the phrases “university-associated” or “university-proximate” to describe the connection between enslaved people and universities in cases where enslaved people were not explicitly legally-bound to the institutions. The specific agreements between enslavers and universities varied on a case-by-case basis. In some circumstances, enslaved people were expressly rented to the institution or its faculty. In other cases, there was no extant legal agreement between slaveholders and universities, only records of enslaved people’s activities.

3 Consider for example Ira Berlin’s *Generations of Captivity* (2003), which centers on the rise of chattel slavery and the plantation system, or Walter Johnson’s *Soul by Soul* (1999), which provides a discussion of the economic and social history of slave markets.

at public institutions, particularly universities, has been relatively limited. Craig Steven Wilder’s 2013 book, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* is widely considered the seminal text on academia and slavery.⁴ However, Wilder’s text focuses primarily on America’s colonial universities, rather than those established in the South during the antebellum era. In recent years, several universities, including University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, University of Mississippi, and Georgetown, among others, have established working groups to research and analyze their historical connections to slavery. In addition to greatly expanding the field, these projects have significantly increased the public’s awareness of slavery in American academia.⁵ Thus far, scholarship on slavery in academia has often centered on the institutions that benefited from slavery rather than the enslaved people themselves. Furthermore, the chattel principle as it existed at Antebellum universities has yet to be examined extensively. The term “chattel

principle,” coined by Harvard historian Walter Johnson in 1999, refers to the commodification of human beings for economic and personal benefit.⁶ While often associated with the slave pens and plantations of the Deep South, the chattel principle also underscored the creation and continued prosperity of the South’s universities, as students, professors and the institutions themselves relied on slaves for economic, social, and personal convenience.

While universities across the South varied in the nature and extent of their involvement with slavery, the letters, financial records, and in some rare cases, the writings of enslaved peoples from Southern universities reveal a unique manifestation of American slavery. This paper aims to examine the relative autonomy granted to enslaved people proximate to antebellum universities while analyzing the interdependence that evolved between enslaved peoples and academic institutions. This work contains references to the financial records of the following universities: Georgetown University, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), The University of Virginia (UVA), and The University of

4 Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

5 See *The New York Times*’ 2016 article on Georgetown University’s sale of enslaved people. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html>.

6 Johnson initially took the term from the 1849 narrative of James W.C. Pennington, a formerly enslaved man who wrote, “The being of slavery, its soul and body, lives and moves in the chattel principle, the property principle, the bill of sale principle; the cart-whip, starvation, and nakedness, are its inevitable consequence to a greater or less extent, warring with the dispositions of men.” James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith: Or Events in the Life of James WC Pennington* (London, 1849), iv-vii. See also Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Mississippi (Ole Miss).⁷ The documents establishing the University of the South provide additional insight into the role of slavery on an ideological and practical level at southern collegiate institutions. Lastly, the writings of George Moses Horton, an enslaved man who lived and worked proximate to UNC, and his contemporary, Jerry Hooper, an enslaved man who worked on UNC's campus, provide firsthand accounts regarding the lives of enslaved people serving universities in the antebellum South.

The clearest connection between slavery and antebellum universities lies in the very creation of the institutions themselves. As universities across the South emerged in the wake of the American Revolution, wealthy trustees and early benefactors rented and purchased enslaved peoples to construct the colleges that would educate future generations of the American elite.⁸ In 1819, slave labor constituted the majority of Thomas Jefferson's labor force as he built his "academical village" in Charlottesville. The university typically hired labor through local

slaveholders, although UVA owned at least nine enslaved people.⁹ As Jefferson finalized the design of his institution, enslaved laborers, working sometimes alongside free blacks and whites, terraced the land on which the university was to be constructed, hauled timber and baked and laid bricks. As university founders and their trustees sought to construct universities to pass on their revolutionary ideals to future generations of Americans, their ambitions inevitably demanded a labor force larger than the slaves they themselves owned. Thus, construction often necessitated that universities purchase or rent slave labor. At Ole Miss, enslaved peoples were almost solely responsible for clearing the campus land, constructing the Lyceum, Chapel, Observatory and other campus buildings and roadways,¹⁰ although there is little documentation of their actions. Likewise, according to financial records kept by William Nichols, an engineer and architect hired for several projects at UNC, the University rented several slaves from local planters to construct the President's House

7 Georgetown, although not geographically part of the antebellum South, demonstrates the considerable presence of slavery in the nation's capital. See Mary Beth Corrigan's "Imaginary Cruelties?" which addresses the extent of slaveholding and slave trading in the nation's capital during the early 19th century. Mary Beth Corrigan, "Imaginary Cruelties?: A History of the Slave Trade in Washington, D.C.," *Washington History: Magazine of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*, 13 (Fall/Winter 2001–2002).

8 Universities often rented enslaved people from private citizens, particularly for large-scale construction projects. For example, during the construction of Jefferson's "academical village" in 1819, UVA hired sixteen enslaved people. See Catherine Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople, and the University of Virginia," Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 2006, 14.

9 Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople, and the University of Virginia," 2006, Proctor's Papers, Receipts of Accounts 1818.

10 The University of Mississippi, "UM Slavery and the University Working Group: 2 Year Report and Proposal for Future Projects," University of Mississippi Slavery Research Group, October 15, 015, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://slaveryresearchgroup.olemiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/145/2017/01/UM-Slavery-and-the-University-Working-Group-ReportFINALno-budgetcompress.pdf>.

and Steward's Hall in 1824.¹¹ The expenses of slave labor are interspersed with other material aspects of the University's construction projects; the ledger lists enslaved people alongside nails, horses and lime. Slave labor was an integral aspect of the South's nascent universities; impersonal references to slave labor in historical construction records (or, in the case of Ole Miss, Georgetown, and others, general lack thereof), speak to the extent that university officials considered slaves to be merely a natural part of the building process, their purpose essentially equivalent to that of nails and bricks.

However, this commodification did not conclude with construction of Southern universities. As universities evolved into complex institutions facing increasing financial pressure, the chattel principle underscored university-slave relations in much the same way that it did on the plantations of the South. Many universities relied on the task system to manage slave labor, as UVA did upon completion of construction. In 1826, the Board of Visitors officially tasked University laborers with a lengthy list of duties, including, "the cleanliness of all the grounds and

tenements" and waste disposal.¹²

Professors at many Southern universities owned enslaved people, and their financial records, like university construction records, fail to differentiate between human and material property. For example, when UNC's Professor Fetter recorded his 1841 expenses, he listed his rented slaves next to his orders of eggs and chickens. To men such as Fetter, slave labor was as much a part of comfortable living as access to food.¹³ However, unlike the young men they taught, many professors were not raised in the Southern slave society. Thus, slavery was often a convenience that they opted into rather than the only social system they had ever known. For example, several of UVA's professors, many of whom hailed from Europe, owned slaves during their tenure at the university.¹⁴ Given the transitory nature of freedom along geographic lines during the antebellum period, enslaved people often experienced a shift in status as their owners moved from university to university. For example, Professor Tucker was forced to manumit his slaves when he left Virginia for Philadelphia. Despite moving to a free state, Tucker's enslaved people

11 William Nichols, "1 September 1826. Account of disbursements by William Nichols," University of North Carolina Papers (#40005), University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3359>.

12 University of Virginia, "Board of Visitors Minutes, December 16, 1826," University of Virginia Library, accessed November 13, 2017, http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=2006_04/uvaGenText/tei/bov_18261205.xml&chunk.id=d3&toc.id=&brand=default.

13 Manuel Fetter, "December 1841. Manuel Fetter Expense Book," Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3405>.

14 Seven of the nine original UVA professors hailed from Europe. Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA," 30.

remained with him and his family, now working as paid household servants. Tucker was willing to accept the institution of slavery when it was permitted, but just as easily relinquished his “right” to slavery upon moving North. The fact that the same people labored for Tucker in both locations reveals the dual nature of the chattel principle; Black laborers could be either human property or paid wage workers, depending only on their physical location.¹⁵

Students at Southern universities also benefited from slave labor. Whether they rented slaves from universities, as many UNC students did, or brought their own personal slaves to college, the sons of wealthy planters continued to profit from slavery throughout their education. Slaves were both a personal convenience and occasionally a source of income for college students. UVA student, William Gibson, brought his slave, Martin, to Charlottesville, where he rented Martin out to other enslavers for three months and earned about \$100 dollars for Martin’s labor in 1857.¹⁶ Such practices allowed students to profit from their personal slaves while retaining the comfort of slave labor through those provided by the university and its affiliates.

Whether owned by the faculty, students or even the institution itself, the labor and bodies of slaves remained a commodity to be bought or sold as necessary. In many cases, Southern colleges liquidated their human assets to preserve their institution, selling slaves to afford other expenses or alleviate financial hardship. Most notably, Georgetown sold 272 enslaved peoples to Louisiana plantations in 1838 in an effort to pay off debts.¹⁷ The articles of agreement between the prominent Jesuit priests who orchestrated the sale and Jesse Beatty and Henry Johnson, the new owners of Georgetown’s human cargo, list the names and ages of the slaves, sold for a total of \$115,000.¹⁸ The provisions of the agreement provided concessions regarding damaged goods, which stated that, should the enclosed slaves “be unhealthy, or in any manner unsound, a fair deduction shall be made.”¹⁹ Such requisites, common with slave sales across the South, indicate the pervasive extent of the chattel principle—indeed, the “damaged goods” clause could just as easily apply to livestock or even crops.

The practice of universities selling slaves to plantations certainly resulted in a dramatic decrease in their autonomy. Slaves at antebellum universities

15 Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 30.

16 William Gibson, “William Gibson Field Journal, 1856-1860,” University of Virginia Special Collections. In Catherine Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 42.

17 Maryland Province Archives, “Articles of agreement between Thomas F. Mulledy, of Georgetown, District of Columbia, of one part, and Jesse Beatty and Henry Johnson, of the State of Louisiana, of the other part. 19th June 1838,” Georgetown Slavery Archive, accessed November 15, 2017, <https://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/items/show/1>.

18 The amount paid is equal to approximately \$3.3 million in current USD.

19 Maryland Province Archives, “Articles of agreement,” 1838.

typically enjoyed a relatively high level of autonomy compared to their rural counterparts. Enslaved persons at Southern institutions generally lived with their families, sometimes even entirely apart from their masters. William and Isabella Gibbons, although each owned by a different UVA professor, raised a family together on Grounds at UVA.²⁰ Furthermore, unlike the unions that occurred on Southern plantations, slave marriages were more likely to be recognized by universities, which diminished the risk of a family-splitting sale. For example, in 1795, Georgetown recognized and recorded the marriage of Phillis, an enslaved woman, in the Georgetown Chapel.²¹ Likewise, even when separated from their spouses and loved ones, enslaved people at colleges were sometimes able to retain their family structure. When Edmund Bacon rented his slaves to the University of Virginia in the 1820s, he did so with the stipulation that "the men can make arrangements with [Proctor Brockenbrough] about coming to see their wives [sic]."²²

Enslaved people on college campuses also engaged in activities not widely accessible to those

held on plantations. At UVA, drinking in taverns and gambling were common among slaves. According to the Faculty Committee, an 1837 investigation found that Albert, enslaved on grounds, had won "nearly two dollars" gambling in Charlottesville.²³ Enslaved people constructing university buildings were occasionally rewarded with whiskey, a practice unheard of among private slaveholders.²⁴ When this practice ended with the conclusion of construction, enslaved people routinely made money by illicitly purchasing whiskey for students.²⁵ Such practices allowed slaves to form a unique fraternal social order, as enslaved people were often able to socialize independently following the school day.

Most importantly, university slaves typically had higher literacy rates than those who belonged to Southern households. Literacy allowed slaves to engage with whites on a level that plantation slaves could not. University slaves routinely exchanged letters with their family members and masters, and even published their writings while enslaved. The accounts of two slaves at UNC, Jerry Hooper and George Moses Horton, reveal a uniquely high degree

20 *The Freedmen's Record* 4, no. 3, March 1868. In Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA."

21 Digital Georgetown, "Slave marriage, 1795," Georgetown Slavery Archive, accessed November 16, 2017.

22 Proctor's Papers, Box 2, Folder E. "Bacon to A. S. Brockenbrough," 16 December 1821. In Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA," 17.

23 *Journal of the Chairman of the Faculty Committee*, Volume II, p. 83, 11 February 1831 and p. 86, 1 February 1831. In Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA," 52.

24 44 Proctor's Papers, Box 1, Folder "Receipts, 1820, August 26, 1820 and September 2, 1820." In Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA," 16.

25 Neale, "Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA," 16.

of autonomy. Hooper, in an 1861 letter to his master, complains that “business is dull” and that he has “lost half of last session’s wages” due to the war. Hooper offers updates on his wife and children before asking his enslaver for permission to “make farther [sic] arrangements.”²⁶ Hooper’s letter implies that his life on UNC’s campus is somewhat removed from that of his enslaver’s, as Hooper lives apart from him.

The poems and letters of Hooper’s contemporary, George Moses Horton, illustrate the great degree of autonomy that literacy could provide. Throughout his adult life, Horton’s poetry granted him relative independence and access to powerful white men in the North and South. Horton, who later rose to fame as the “The Colored Bard of North Carolina,” began his career selling love poems to students and published his first poetry book, *The Hope of Liberty*, in 1828.²⁷ One especially telling piece describes the poet’s “dismal path” towards freedom.²⁸ In a later poem, Horton professes his genius and expresses his

resentment for his enslavement: “I know that I am old/and can never recover what is past/But for the future may some light unfold/And soar from ages blast.”²⁹ Horton’s poems, remarkable in content and readership, gained him a great degree of fame as an enslaved person.³⁰ This renown allowed Horton to live relatively independently, despite his enslavement, as Horton used the profits from his poetry to purchase time from his master, William Horton. In an 1844 letter to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Horton proclaimed, “I gratify your curiosity in resolving.. whether a negro has any genius or not.”³¹ Horton’s poetry, and the fame he acquired due to it, ultimately allowed him to correspond with well-to-do whites from across the nation. In an undated letter, Horton entreated David L. Swain, president of UNC and the 26th governor of North Carolina, to purchase him: “I have been some time since very anxious for some Gentleman,.. to buy me, and have recently made the choice of you, sir.”³² The letter is especially notable

26 Jerry Hooper, “19 October 1861. Letter from Jerry Hooper to Master,” John DeBerniere Hooper Papers (#835), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3403>.

27 Richard Walser, “George Moses Horton, 1798? - ca.1880,” Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina Archives, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hortonlife/bio.html>.

28 George Moses Horton, “On Hearing of the Intention of a Gentleman to Purchase the Poet’s Freedom,” Poets.org, 1829, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/hearing-intention-gentleman-purchase-poets-freedom>.

29 Horton, “George Moses Horton, Myself.”

30 Walser, “George Moses Horton, 1798?-ca.1880.”

31 George Moses Horton, “3 September 1844. George Moses Horton to David L. Swain,” David L. Swain Papers (#706), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 17, 2017, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3390>.

32 George Moses Horton, “Undated. George Moses Horton to David L. Swain,” David L. Swain Papers (#706), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 17, 2017, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3392>.

in its tone. Horton addresses Swain as though the two men are equals, despite that the content of the letter itself discusses one man purchasing another. Because of his association with UNC and his remarkable literary talent, Horton boasted a large readership and access to some of the nation's white elites.

Although university slaves were still subjected to many plantation practices, often at the hands of rowdy students, they were sometimes protected by the institutions themselves. In 1837, when students assaulted Lewis Commodore, the bell-ringer at UVA, he was asked to testify regarding the incident and identified the perpetrators.³³ Commodore's testimony is exceptional, even among university slaves, and it reveals the peculiar nature of master-slave relations on campuses. The students who assaulted Lewis did so with the belief that they, as white men, had the right to beat any slave whose behavior they disliked, which in Lewis' case comprised of ringing the bell early in the morning for the start of class.³⁴ However, the university's decision to allow him to testify indicates the respect that Lewis had earned among leaders of the college, as in other cases in which enslaved people witnessed or were victims of crime, they were excluded from legal proceedings.³⁵ Although student

“masters” degraded him, his legal owner upheld it in asking him to provide legal testimony in the Chairman of the Faculty's subsequent investigation.³⁶

Despite occasionally benefitting from institutional protection, the distinct master-slave dynamic on campus often allowed for increased abuse. Just as on plantations, practices such as slave rape and routine beatings were prevalent. Many white students considered themselves to be the masters of enslaved people on campus, regardless of legal ownership. Enslaved people, particularly enslaved women, were heavily outnumbered by white men which often resulted in mass harassment and violence. As a result, enslaved women at Southern universities were subjected to sexual violence by multiple perpetrators, sometimes even simultaneously. In 1829, a group of drunk students, led by William Carr, attempted to break into a professor's house to “get access” to a female servant.³⁷ Although Carr and his entourage were unsuccessful in this instance, many college students did commit sexual violence against enslaved women on campus. In a similar incident in 1860, S.B. Humphreys, an Ole Miss student, snuck into the president's house with “shameful designs upon one of the servants,” whom he assaulted. At Ole

33 Journal of the Chairman of the Faculty, 13 November 1837 and 14 November 1837. Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 23.

34 Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 23.

35 Neale notes two other cases in which an enslaved men “altercations” but were not asked to testify about the incidents, despite being the only witnesses. Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 2006, 25.

36 Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 23.

37 UVA Faculty Minutes on: 25 June 1829; 7 September 1829; 23 June 1830; and 10 September 1831. In Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 2006.

Miss, students formed a “Vigilance Committee of Students” who routinely attacked campus slaves under the guise of preventing an “insurrection.”³⁸ In 1850, three UVA students traveled into Charlottesville for the night, where they kidnapped an teenage enslaved woman who lived near campus.³⁹ The young men then repeatedly raped the young girl in a field, stopping only when discovered by another student. Although the tactics and the violent outcomes of such actions were identical to those on plantations, college students could not claim the same protection under law as their fathers could, as they typically did not legally own the university-proximate enslaved people. Beatings could not be justified under the pretense of increasing slave productivity and profit, nor could slave rape be excused as a means of increasing a man’s labor force. In such instances, universities sometimes punished the students in question, thereby offering a weak, if not tacit, acknowledgement of enslaved people’s natural rights. In one 1860 case at Ole Miss, a student, Mr. Wright, was “indefinitely suspended” for burning an enslaved man’s cheek with a cigar.⁴⁰ Despite universities’ efforts, however, these punishments were often weak and difficult to enforce. In the

Charlottesville rape case, for example, the students in question were expelled and pursued by police, however, after the three men fled the campus, neither the city nor the university could truly seek justice.⁴¹

However, as the institution of slavery grew more contentious as the nineteenth century progressed, Southern universities and their students ultimately defended their reliance on the practice, adopting increasingly more explicit pro-slavery views. Universities underwent an ideological shift similar to that which occurred among plantation owners; slavery at universities became a “positive good,” as the South Carolinian politician John C. Calhoun famously stated in an 1837 speech, rather than a convenient source of labor. Many universities adopted both biblical and pseudo-scientific justifications for the continued enslavement of Africans, a trend that mirrored sentiments on plantations throughout the South. In 1823, Georgetown’s Joseph Mobberly, wrote that “slavery is not only lawful, reasonable, and good, but that it is also necessary.”⁴² Similarly, the Dialectic Society at UNC increasingly focused on the question of slavery as the 19th century progressed, proclaiming that Southern slavery was “justifiable” and utterly

38 The University of Mississippi, “UM Slavery and the University Working Group,” 2015, 28-29.

39 Neale, “Slaves, Freedpeople and UVA,” 54.

40 The University of Mississippi, “UM Slavery,” 152.

41 The University of Mississippi, “UM Slavery,” 55.

42 Joseph P. Mobberly, “Slavery is Good, is Necessary: The Mobberly Diaries, Part II, August 1823,” August 1823, SJ Papers, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown Slavery Archive, Washington, D.C., accessed November 20, 2017.

necessary for American prosperity.⁴³ As the young men of Southern colleges prepared to protect slavery, antebellum universities took a decisively pro-slavery, anti-republican stance.⁴⁴ In 1856, UNC dismissed Professor William Hendricks on the grounds that he violated the university's ban on “partisan politics” by harboring pro-Fremont views, despite many UNC professors being well-known for their pro-slavery views.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Jacob Thompson in 1848 proclaimed slavery as a founding ideal of Ole Miss, claiming that “it is verily a sin against our children to send them into that circle of fanaticism, which surrounds our Northern colleges.”⁴⁶ Thompson's point regarding Ole Miss' founding reflects the increased animosity between the North and South, as prior to the decade preceding secession the Southern white elite generally sent their sons to Northern universities, which were considered more prestigious.⁴⁷

As established universities increasingly took more rigid stances on slavery, the most prominent Southern planters sought to found an institution for

the explicit purpose of guaranteeing the continuation of slavery in the South. As the Civil War loomed, Southern planters and bishops planned to create The University of the South, where slavery would be enshrined and free from northern influence. At the laying of the cornerstone at Sewanee in 1860, John Smith Preston, a wealthy South Carolinian planter, delivered an address to students in which he proclaimed, “He has the gravest mission ever entrusted to man, that of redeeming to Christianity, through the portals of slavery, an inferior, subject, dependent and necessary race, on which his whole order of civilization is based.”⁴⁸ With the creation of the University of the South, Southern academia and slavery became explicitly intertwined. The South's dependence on the peculiar institution now necessitated a university founded solely upon its survival.

In 1863, Union troops destroyed the cornerstone of the University of the South. The ideological cornerstone of Sewanee had also

43 Erika Lindeman, “The Debating Societies: Electronic Edition,” Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina Archives. Accessed November 19, 2017, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp05-02/chp05-02.html>.

44 “6 October 1856. Proceedings of the Faculty,” Records of the General Faculty and Faculty Council (#40106), University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed November 19, 2017, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/3386>.

45 Most notably, Professor Elisha Mitchell wrote about his views in *The Other Leaf of the Book of Nature and the Word of God* a few years prior to the Hendricks's dismissal.

46 Jacob Thompson, “Address, Delivered on Occasion of the Opening of the University of the State of Mississippi: In Behalf of the Board of Trustees, November 6, 1848,” 5. <http://slaveryresearchgroup.olemiss.edu/jacob-thompsons-1848-vision-for-the-new-college/>.

47 Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

48 Worth millions, Preston was one of the wealthiest men of his generation at one time enslaving 701 persons on a Louisiana plantation outside New Orleans. The University of the South, “The Truest Men,” Sewanee University of the South, Accessed November 22, 2017, <http://omeka.sewanee.edu/exhibits/show/foundedtomakemen/thetruestmen>.

been shattered. When formal construction began after the War, paid laborers--not enslaved people--completed the work. The South had fundamentally changed, and now its universities inevitably would as well. Nevertheless, the connection between Southern universities and slavery did not end when college slaves became college "servants" in 1865. Accordingly, the legacy of slavery remains necessarily tethered to the institutions of the South. The lecture halls and dormitories, built by enslaved people and named for their masters, still stand today. Southern universities continued to exploit black labor throughout the century following the Civil War.⁴⁹ The historiography has thus far failed to adequately address the extent to which enslaved people contributed to, benefitted from, and ultimately were exploited by the growth of Southern universities during the antebellum period. Although proximity to academia provided enslaved people with greater autonomy and access to education, the unusual relationship between enslaved people and the institutions at which they labored also resulted in widespread violence at the hands of students. Furthermore, the chattel principle underscored the rise of Southern universities, as enslaved people were widely used for their labor, and were occasionally sold

to bolster the finances of fledgling institutions; the chattel principle was the cornerstone of antebellum universities, and its legacy remains central to the colleges of the American South.

49 For example, schools across the nation often employed poor black people as cooks and janitors. At Ole Miss, campus records from the 1870 census list nineteen black people living on the campus working as cooks, house servants, laborers and waiters. The University of Mississippi, "UM Slavert."

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“Genocide Pop”:

The Shortcomings of *Schindler’s List* as Holocaust Memory

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¹*Schindler’s List* (1993) is perhaps the most important, and certainly the most commercially successful Holocaust film of all time. Directed by Steven Spielberg and adapted from Thomas Keneally’s historical novel *Schindler’s Ark*,² the film documents how Oskar Schindler saved roughly 1,200 Jews from Auschwitz by employing them in his enamelware factory during the Second World War. Winning seven Oscars, including the prizes for Best Picture and Best Director, *Schindler’s List* is widely regarded as one of the greatest films ever made, and had an unprecedented impact on Hollywood and the American public. Spielberg’s talent and reputation allowed the film to reach a wide audience, introducing many to the brutal horrors of the Holocaust for the first time. This audience continued to expand as pop culture icons like Oprah Winfrey, as well as politicians like Governor Christine Whitman of New Jersey, publicly acclaimed the movie, suggesting it made them better people, and that it should be required viewing in school curriculums.³ Given the exceptional

impact of the film on the public sphere, *Schindler’s List* demands closer scrutiny.

This research paper seeks to explore the reception history of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, specifically within the Jewish community. Given its impact, it is not surprising that there is ample scholarly literature on *Schindler’s List*. My research draws from Jewish publications, such as *Commentary* and *Shofar*, as well as scholarly essays and critical reviews from reputable news publications. By engaging primarily, but not exclusively, with Jewish authors, I will explore the reception, and particularly the core criticisms, of the people who Spielberg intended to empower with his film. I also conducted a close viewing of *Schindler’s List* as part of my research methodology, and I will offer my own insight into the film where necessary. Ultimately, I will examine how *Schindler’s List* functions within the broader tradition of Holocaust memory. I will argue that, despite its cinematic brilliance and profound cultural impact, *Schindler’s List* ultimately fails as a meaningful

1 “Genocide Pop” is the title of an article taken from the *Washington Post* critical of *Schindler’s List*. See Philip Gourevitch, “Genocide Pop,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1994. Accessed February 25, 2018.

2 Thomas Keneally, *Schindler’s Ark* (London: Penguin Books, 1983).

3 Sara R. Horowitz, “But Is It Good for the Jews? Spielberg’s Schindler and the Aesthetics of Atrocity,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*, ed. by Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 119-39.

source of Holocaust memory. In its quest to become commercially successful, the film necessarily sacrifices meaning for accessibility. I will primarily focus on the conflicts surrounding Schindler as a historical figure, Spielberg's troublesome portrayal of the archetype of the "Good Nazi," the extent to which the affirmative tone of *Schindler's List* contributes to the tradition of the "Americanization of the Holocaust," and the demeaning ways in which the film represents its Jewish characters.

The first problem I will explore concerns the way Spielberg represents Oskar Schindler as a historical figure in the film. Many historians have raised qualms about Spielberg's claim that he intended *Schindler's List* as a historical document rather than a film,⁴ especially given the liberties he took in adapting it from Thomas Keneally's book. One key problem centers on Spielberg's portrayal of the ambiguity of Schindler's motives, and thus his tacit assertion of the concept of the "Good Nazi." This concept rightly seems paradoxical. Keneally's book makes it clear that after the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, Schindler had a change of heart, realizing that the Nazis intended to annihilate the Jews.⁵ Thus Schindler's motives are unambiguous. However, Spielberg, who claimed to have "deliberately eschewed interpretation

in favor of reporting,"⁶ fails to clearly show the moment of Schindler's critical mental shift. Rather, to make matters worse, Spielberg has him deliver a dramatically-crafted speech at the end, in which Schindler openly acknowledges that he is a Nazi, a criminal, and a profiteer off slave labor, his swastika pin displayed openly on his lapel. Philip Gourevitch of *Commentary Magazine* observes that, by showing Schindler's final self-identification with his Nazi membership, Spielberg misses an important chance to crystallize Schindler's motivations. Schindler's actions seemed to be a clear indication that he had abandoned the core principles Nazism, yet Spielberg's representation unnecessarily complicates this fact, opening the possibility that the hero of the film may, in fact, still be an ideological Nazi.⁷ It is crucial to present Nazi ideology as the inherently genocidal and categorically evil ideology that it is. This is not to say that any individual who, at any point, identified with the party is irredeemably bad. However, anyone who remained truly loyal to the Nazi party throughout the war, long after atrocities became known, bears responsibility and is complicit in an evil regime. Although Schindler clearly stopped supporting the Nazi Regime, the Schindler of Spielberg's film remains, for all intents and purposes, a Nazi from start

4 Philip Gourevitch, "A Dissent on 'Schindler's List,'" *Commentary Magazine*, February 1, 1994.

5 Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 32.

6 Gourevitch, "A Dissent."

7 Gourevitch, "A Dissent."

to finish.

Why Spielberg does this is unclear. Perhaps he sought to challenge the viewer’s notion of where morality manifests in this world? Perhaps it is a rhetorical flourish, meant to increase the dramatism of Schindler’s final address to his workers. Perhaps it was an oversight. Such speculation is fruitless and unnecessary, for whatever Spielberg’s personal intent, his decision was, in practice, problematic. That a Holocaust film with such a broad reach might blatantly present a self-acknowledged Nazi as the story’s protagonist, as the unquestionable standard-bearer of selflessness, sends a harmful message to its viewers, many of whom learned of the Holocaust for the first time from this film. The brutal sadism of Amon Göth, a murderous SS Officer who serves as the film’s antagonist, comes to seem like an exception when juxtaposed with Schindler’s virtue. After all, are they not both ideological Nazis? The answer, of course, is no: by the end of the war, Schindler was no more loyal to the Nazi party than were the Jewish workers in his factory. Yet Spielberg robs us of any explicit renunciation. His heart must have changed, but Spielberg gives us a Schindler whose Nazi party membership bookends the film. In allowing for the notion of the “Good Nazi” to emerge, Spielberg’s products unintentionally present the argument that

the Nazi atrocities occurred at the hands of *a few bad apples*, denying accountability of the Nazi ideology, raging antisemitism and all. But Schindler’s heroism is diametrically opposed to Nazism. He remains the only former Nazi buried on Mt. Zion,⁸ but it is essential to recognize that he is buried as a righteous gentile, and *not* as a righteous Nazi. Spielberg’s failure to present Schindler’s renunciation of Nazism here is both historically inaccurate and grossly offensive to the legacy of Holocaust memory.

In exploring Spielberg’s representation of the “Good Nazi,” I entertained the premise that Oskar Schindler was a true hero, and that complications arose only from Spielberg’s failure to separate his heroism from his Nazi ideology. However, Schindler himself remains a complex and troublesome historical figure. There are several ethical concerns about Schindler’s role in the Holocaust. Most of this stems from Schindler’s economic opportunism, and the questionable roles that German Industrialists played during the war under the Nazi Regime. In a detailed biography, David Crowe illustrates how most of Schindler’s life was categorized by such opportunism. While Schindler’s life in the 1930s is unclear, Crowe explains that Schindler took a job as a German spy in Czechoslovakia in order to boost his connections in the upper tiers of Nazi society. He was

8 David Crowe, *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story behind the List*. (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

imprisoned by Czech authorities in 1938, but gained his freedom soon after with the German annexation of the Sudetenland. Now well-connected, Schindler coordinated his business ventures closely with Nazi military movements, arriving in Krakow just days after the conquest of Poland to take advantage of the newly-seized Jewish businesses in the industrial town. Schindler's business dealings from then on were as lucrative as they were sleazy, with Schindler giving massive bribes to Nazi officers in order to sustain his profits, a factor underemphasized in the film.⁹

Schindler certainly did change from the time he witnessed the brutal liquidation of the Krakow ghetto until the end of the war. It is true that the process of saving the Jews on his eponymous list put him in immense danger. However, even in his most virtuous moments, Schindler was still a troubling figure. At the very least, Schindler was profiting off the unpaid labor of the Jews in his factory, which initially served as a strong economic incentive for his humanitarianism.¹⁰ In the film, Schindler first frame his desire to keep specific Jews working in his factory as a matter of efficiency. He reasons that his current staff effectively keeps his factory productive, and losing these workers to concentration camps would reduce this productivity and require him to

train new workers. Spielberg presents this excuse as Schindler's way of avoiding the suspicion of Nazi officials, but in practice, these were genuine economic concerns that may have further motivated Schindler to maintain a workforce of Jewish prisoners in his factory. However, as the war neared its end, Schindler began to lose significant money through the bribes he paid to keep his workers safe; it is clear that at this point, money was no longer his primary motivator. Nonetheless, Schindler's record during this time is not unblemished. In fact, recent research by Arnold Krammer into Schindler's personal life suggests he verbally and physically abused his workers, so much so that officials at Yad Vashem waited more than twenty years after his death to declare him a righteous gentile.¹¹ Many theories further posit that pure altruism was not the cause of Schindler's good deed. Some (rather cynically, I might say) argue Schindler acted justly to avoid accusations of complicity with the Nazi Regime, as he saw the war was unwinnable; others, including some of the *Schindlerjuden* (the Jews that Schindler saved), say that personal guilt from his role as a German industrialist motivated his actions.¹² Interestingly, even if we take Schindler's moral transformation to be genuine, we should note that Schindler struggled to adjust to new business

⁹ Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*.

¹⁰ Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*.

¹¹ Arnold Krammer, "Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story Behind," *Central European History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 523–525.

¹² Krammer, "Oskar Schindler," 523–525.

environment of postwar Germany. No longer well-connected, he depended on goodwill contributions from his former Jewish workers as his marriage collapsed and his postwar business ventures failed.¹³

Yet in the film, Spielberg portrays Schindler as a man permanently changed for the better. Towards the end of film, the character of Itzhak Stern remarks that the list is an “absolute good,” and so too is the audience meant to see “absolute good” reflected in Schindler as a person. In its moral triumph, Spielberg uses Schindler’s character to assert an uplifting message about the nature of the human spirit: that people are, at their core, good, and that even in a dark moment in human history, virtue can rise and conquer. Thus, Spielberg’s message transcends the Holocaust and seeks to make a broader statement about human nature. This is best captured in a quote from Itzhak Stern, who, at the end of the film, presents a ring to Schindler on behalf of all of the Jews he saved. Stern reads the inscription of the ring, which draws from the Talmud, out loud: “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire.” This quote is poignant, and, as an isolated sentiment of gratitude, appropriate. Schindler’s risk saved over a thousand lives, and to those he saved, this bravery ought to be acknowledged. However, Spielberg wishes to assert this message more generally as the central theme of

the film, that a single act of strong virtue can make up for the atrocities of humankind. Moreover, the lesson Spielberg wants to take from the Holocaust is one redemptive of human nature. This is an inappropriate theme to assert. Schindler’s bravery was an isolated incident, and though his story is uplifting, the Holocaust in general was anything but. Millions of Jews still died at the hands of the Nazi Regime, and presenting the Holocaust as a merely moment of redemption for one man disgraces its victims. It is unclear why Schindler rebelled against the failures of humankind, but more importantly, we must note that the vast majority of those in a position like Schindler’s *did not* rebel, and this widespread moral failure is more important than Spielberg’s message. This becomes especially troublesome when considering that many Americans picture the Holocaust directly through the lens of this film. In framing *Schindler’s List* as a triumph of the good of humankind, Spielberg robs his viewers of an opportunity to truly engage with the incalculable, enduring suffering of the Holocaust, and dilutes the uniqueness of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis.

Jason Epstein crystallizes this flaw when he writes in his critique of the film that “Except to the people whose lives he saved, Schindler made no difference to the outcome of the Holocaust. But the

¹³ Crowe, *Oskar Schindler*.

film's aim is to show that he made a huge difference... What then of the others?¹⁴ Extrapolating Spielberg's uplifting message about human nature to the whole outcome of the war, and to human nature at large, trivializes the memory of the victims. Furthermore, with Schindler's own complicated history laid out, it is difficult to say to what extent he should be held as a Talmudic "saviour of the world." Spielberg's troublesome choice to put forth an uplifting theme dampens the heavy yet critically important subject matter of *Schindler's List*, a topic which I will explore in greater detail in the next section. For now, we must note that Schindler's complex character at the very least complicates Spielberg's portrayal of him as an unequivocal hero. I still struggle with where I fall on Schindler as a historical figure, for, motivations aside, the consequences of his list are inarguably good. The question falls on the extent to which we ought to lionize Schindler as a hero, and Spielberg's thoughtless representation of the man diminishes the positive impact of the film.

It is necessary to next explore the complex place *Schindler's List* occupies in the tradition of the "Americanization of the Holocaust," an attempt in American media culture to manipulate representations of the Holocaust to be more palatable and accessible. Early examples in this tradition, such as the film

adaptation of *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, sought to omit graphic violence, while injecting love interests and other melodramatic elements into the plot to make it more commercially successful among American audiences. *Schindler's List* is markedly different in this regard; there is no cheap love interest plot line, and the movie does not shy away from showing the graphic brutality of the Nazi Regime. Many of the film's most memorable sequences, such as when Amon Göth shoots carelessly and without repercussion at the camp prisoners from the comfort of his balcony, draw their power by engaging directly with violence. However, *Schindler's List* is still undoubtedly Americanized, particularly in its effort to be uplifting. This effort is so blatant that the *Washington Post* mockingly dubbed it the "most affirmative movie ever made of the Shoah."¹⁵ Prior to directing *Schindler's List*, Spielberg specialized in adventure films, such as *Indiana Jones*, *E.T.*, and *Jaws*. These films, while masterfully directed and culturally iconic, are characterized by sentimentality and childishness, which likely contributed to their universal appeal and commercial success. Most relevantly, Spielberg's films always end on triumphant notes, with tidy conflict resolutions and happy endings. These films established Spielberg's reputation as a brilliant director cinematographically, but as a bit

14 Jason Epstein, "A Dissent on 'Schindler's List'," *The New York Review of Books*, 21 Apr. 1994, www.nybooks.com/articles/1994/04/21/a-dissent-on-schindlers-list/.

15 Philip, "Genocide Pop."

of a lightweight thematically.

While many critics view *Schindler’s List* as a transition into a more serious era of Spielberg’s career, vestiges of his earlier days emerge throughout the film. The greatest case for Spielberg’s Americanization of the Holocaust involves the way he chooses to conclude *Schindler’s List*. Spielberg seeks a happy, cleanly-resolved ending, and, in doing so, falsely implies that life after liberation was not difficult for Holocaust survivors. The narrative portion of the film, told entirely in black and white, ends with Schindler giving a melodramatic speech to the people he saved, the rich orchestral theme rising, and his Nazi pin still prominently on display, as he breaks down into tears over the guilt that he failed to save more people. He is comforted by the workers he saved before fleeing into the darkness of night. Spielberg then quickly shows the moment of liberation, with the Russian liberator pointing the newly-freed Jews towards a local village so that they can find food. As the *Schindlerjuden* walk towards town, the film suddenly bursts into color, displaying Mt. Zion cemetery in Jerusalem, where the still-living members of Schindler’s actual list visit his grave. The movie thus ends on an uplifting note that shifts focus back to Schindler’s heroic, moral triumph, a sequence that Spielberg intended as a touching

tribute to further ground the film in reality.

Commenting on the film’s ending, James Woods, who starred in the miniseries *Holocaust*, declared that *Schindler’s List* “elevates the human spirit,” and that finding moral virtue in Schindler “amidst such a sewer of depravity is so monumental.¹⁶” But is this the best message to take away from a Holocaust film? If anything, Spielberg’s ending, and James Woods’ commentary, serve to show how *Schindler’s List* is ceaselessly concerned with Schindler himself, and not with his list. But what of the *Schindlerjuden* after the war? While Spielberg’s ending offers a tidy resolution, the struggle for Holocaust survivors continued for years after the war. Survivors not only had to deal with the grief of having lost loved ones, but also struggled to reestablish any semblance of a normal life. They had no money, nor possessions. Their houses were destroyed or repossessed. In many cases, Jews would face persecution if they returned to their prewar villages,¹⁷ and many survivors spent years working to get emigration papers, living in Displaced Person Camps, and frantically clinging to the often empty hope that their loved ones had survived.

Spielberg glosses over this post-war struggle entirely. By jumping directly from liberation into his

16 N.A. “James Woods on ‘Schindler’s List.’” AFI: *10 Top 10*, The American Film Institute (2008), www.afi.com/10top10/moviede-tail.aspx?id=22&thumb=2.

17 Jack Kugelmass et al. *From a Ruined Garden: the Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

technicolor epilogue, Spielberg implies that the end of the war restored normalcy to Europe, and that the Jews, pictured comfortably and well dressed in their old age as they visit Mt. Zion, carry the vestiges of their wartime experience merely as memories that they have moved on from since. In positing that the Jewish struggle in Europe ended at the moment of liberation, Spielberg's film presents the Holocaust as an isolated episode in our history, shameful at the time, but starkly contained within the time period of 1938-1945. The shift from the black and white of the Holocaust to the vibrant color of the present day suggests that the narrative part of the film and the resolution take place in two completely different worlds, that the present day is bright, hopeful, and, most importantly, distant from the depravity of the Nazis. In addition to trivializing the postwar adversity of survivors, Spielberg's inattention to nuance here glosses over the violent European antisemitism that persists today, exonerating these antisemites of their culpability. In ignoring that fact, and instead presenting an optimistic resolution to a horrible tragedy, the film robs its viewers of their own responsibility to "never again" allow something like the Holocaust to occur. The uplifting tone breeds complacency; why bother working to never allow such an event to happen again

when such moral depravity, and its repercussions, so clearly ended with liberation decades ago?

Instead of paying tribute to the millions of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, the film pays tribute to the pseudo-tragedy of Schindler's death in old age, many years after the war. Schindler lived beyond liberation, while the Jewish victims did not, and Spielberg has made it clear that he will only engage with the tragedy Holocaust as constrained by the war. When asked what he thought of *Schindler's List*, famed director Stanley Kubrick commented, "Think that's about the Holocaust? That was about success, wasn't it? The Holocaust is about six million people who get killed. 'Schindler's List' is about [1200] who don't."¹⁸ *Schindler's List*, at its core, focuses on survival, not death. This includes both literal survival, and a symbolic survival of faith in humankind. Spielberg's epilogue highlights the lesson he wishes for his film to transmit the Holocaust: that the human spirit can triumph over the darkest evil. His insistence on this lesson is as much an insult to those who died as to those who struggled to live on in a world that betrayed them.

I must include that some Jewish reviewers, including Jeremy Maron of *Shofar*, have defended the Spielberg's melodramatic style as an essential

18 A.J. Goldmann, "Kubrick's Unrealized Vision; Book Reveals Movie Director's Fascination with the Holocaust," *Forward*, Aug 05, 2005, pp. 11. Accessed on ProQuest, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/367376776?accountid=14707>.

historiographical tool that helps to connect the viewer emotionally to the subject.¹⁹ We have already discussed how, prior to *Schindler’s List*, Spielberg made his career off sentimental blockbusters. The wide success of *Schindler’s List* is due at least in part to its poignant melodrama, and if the goal of Holocaust film is merely to reach as wide an audience as possible, then the melodrama helps to achieve this. More frequently, however, critics argue that the “Spielberg-esque” sentimentality of *Schindler’s List* cheapens its impact, as Miriam Bratu Hansen does in her article “*Schindler’s List* is Not *Shoah*.” Here, she argues that Spielberg treats the topic of the Holocaust in the same way he treats spectacles such as *Jurassic Park*: as a product of Hollywood, and an example of “the ugly pun of ‘Shoah business.’²⁰” The film is a spectacle, constructed to pull its viewers’ heartstrings. Despite Spielberg’s insistence that he was, “not making a film... [but] making a document,²¹” *Schindler’s List*, dramatic tension, sappy endings, and all, is a textbook example of Spielberg’s Hollywood.

Finally, if the hero of *Schindler’s List* is a Nazi, then what role do Jews play within the movie? It is essential to consider the stark difference in the manner in which Spielberg represents his Jewish and Nazi

characters. The film’s Jewishness, which has been written about extensively, is important to explore, since its function in modern culture is as an illustration of recent Jewish history. However, throughout the film, Spielberg misses several important opportunities in characterizing Polish Jewry. His cinematographic choices range from puzzling to grotesque. There are two main problems with his representation of his Jewish characters: Spielberg’s deindividuation of Jews, and his use of shameful Jewish stereotypes.

The first point, the deindividuation of Jews, is hard to understand, especially with the knowledge of Spielberg’s motivations to make his film. Spielberg drew inspiration from his own Jewish roots when he decided to make *Schindler’s List*, seeing it as an opportunity to engage with his family history. He has mentioned in interviews that he hoped the process of making the film would allow him to bear witness to the horrors his family endured, and, in doing so, grow closer to his own Jewish roots.²² It would seem that a Jewish director, making a film about a uniquely Jewish event in order to get in touch with his personal Jewish history, would, at the very least, put effort into presenting his Jewish characters in a thoughtful way. Instead, Spielberg opts to present the Jewry as

19 Jeremy Maron, “Affective Historiography: *Schindler’s List*, Melodrama and Historical Representation,” *Shofar* 27, no. 4 (Summer, 2009): 66-68.

20 Miriam Bratu Hansen, “*Schindler’s List* Is Not *Shoah*: Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 119-139.

21 Gourevitch, “A Dissent.”

22 Gourevitch, “A Dissent.”

chaotic masses, guided helplessly by the Germans first to ghettos, then to cattle cars, and eventually to their deaths. Film critic Frank Rich noted that, as a Jew, he found the film numbing rather than moving, in part because, “The [Jewish characters], who have the generic feel of composites, are as forgettable as the chorus in a touring company of ‘Fiddler on the Roof,’ or, for that matter, the human dino-fodder of ‘Jurassic Park.’²³” Over the course of the film, there is only one truly developed Jewish character: Itzhak Stern, a Jewish community leader and Schindler’s personal accountant at his Krakow factory²⁴. The rest of the Jewish characters are as indistinguishable to us as they are to the Germans.

It is no coincidence that Stern happens to be the Jew who interacts the most with Schindler himself. In fact, even though Stern is given ample screen time, he is almost exclusively depicted as a quiet, secondary character alongside Schindler, who dominates the dialogue. He is an underdeveloped character who serves almost exclusively as an extension of Schindler. The juxtaposition of Schindler’s strongly individual presence with the hoardlike representation of Jews presents the story within a recognizably Christian framework. Sara Horowitz thoroughly explores this problem in her article “But Is It Good for Jews?”

where she notes that Spielberg frames much of his film with Christian imagery, particularly in presenting Schindler as a Christ figure, while representing Jewish people through flimsy stereotypes.²⁵ Recalling the Talmud verse, “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire,” it is easy to see how Schindler, as the saviour, can take on a Christlike status. The phrase “the world entire” fits cleanly with the notion that Jesus Christ saved all of mankind from sin. As a result, it may seem there is no need for Spielberg to present the Jews as individuals. Through this framework, the Jews are a nothing more than the masses, the collective beneficiary of Schindler’s divine charity. It is not uncommon to apply a christian framework to the Holocaust. In the foreword to Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, Francois Mauriac explains how he cannot help but interpret the suffering of the Holocaust through the Christian notion of suffering, seeing in each victim some hint of “that other Jew” that who died on the cross for mankind.²⁶ I will not explore here how incredibly perverse this interpretation is; I only wish to show that using the Christian framing is both common and problematic.

Judith Doneson interprets this trope of Christian framing through what she calls “the feminization of the Jew” in film, noting that “if one

23 Frank Rich, “Journal; Extras In the Shadows,” *The New York Times*, 2 Jan. 1994, www.nytimes.com/1994/01/02/opinion/journal-extras-in-the-shadows.html.

24 Gourevitch, “A Dissent.”

25 Horowitz, “But Is It Good,” 119-39.

26 Elie Wiesel and Francois Mauriac, “Foreword to *Night*,” *Night*, Hill and Wang, a Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

were to examine the myriad of fiction films exploring the Holocaust... irrespective of country of origin... these films portray, in some manner, Christians/ gentiles attempting to save the lives of weak, passive Jews.”²⁷ This is demeaning to Jews, and ahistorical in the sense that most gentiles stayed silent during the Holocaust. The depiction of Schindler as a Christ figure, and thus the Jews as Christ’s followers, serves to undermine the tragedy of the Holocaust. By asserting some grander triumph, a la Christ’s redemption of mankind through self-sacrifice, he imposes the Christian lens of redemptive martyrdom onto this dark era. We have already discussed at length how Schindler’s actions in no way redeem the wider tragedy of the Holocaust. Sadly, the inappropriately affirmative nature of Spielberg’s film rears its head here once more, and will again later in this paper.

Further, interpreting a movie about Jewish victims through Christian imagery may serve to insult Jewish victims and the Jewish faith, especially when most of the perpetrators of the Holocaust were, in fact, Christian Germans. This is compounded by Spielberg’s “Good Nazi” concept, for it makes the assertion that Schindler was not merely a morally upright Nazi, but a Nazi comparable to Christ. This section of analysis is not meant in any way to be an

indictment of Christianity on the whole; I simply wish to point out that Spielberg’s application of the Christian framework is puzzling and complicates the reception of *Schindler’s List*. Whatever its cause, the Christian imagery, and the more general deindividuation of the Jewry, presents Spielberg’s film wholly through a German perspective, or, as *Commentary* writer Philip Gourevitch puts it, Spielberg “depicts the Nazi slaughter of the Polish Jewry almost entirely through German eyes.”²⁸ This sentiment is present even in positive reviews of the film. For example, Jonathan Rosenbaum of the *Chicago Tribune*, who dubbed the film a “must see,” still noted that, “Despite both the subject matter and the fact that Spielberg himself is Jewish, Schindler’s List is anything but a Jewish film... even Jews who see this film are implicitly transformed by the narrative structure into gentile viewers.”²⁹ A film that started as a deeply personal, deeply Jewish project ultimately abandons this Jewishness in the final product. This choice to tell the story through German rather than Jewish eyes is most clearly and troublingly illustrated in Spielberg’s use of Jewish stereotypes.

Spielberg was explicitly conscious of his use of stereotypes. From the beginning of the casting process, he and his directorial team sought “families, who look

27 Judith E. Doneson, “The Image Lingers: The Feminization of the Jew in Schindler’s List,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on ‘Schindler’s List,’* ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 140-152.

28 Gourevitch, “A Dissent.”

29 Jonathon Rosenbaum, “Gentle Persuasion - Schindler’s List,” *Chicago Reader*, Chicago Reader, 16 Dec. 1993, www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/gentle-persuasion/Content?oid=883459.

stereotypically Semitic,” and with strong, Eastern European accents, to play the Jewish extras in the film.³⁰ This contrasts starkly with the manner in which Spielberg presents his Nazi characters, particularly in their manner of speech. Amon Göth, the primary antagonist, along with Schindler himself, speak with clear, elegant accents, a departure from the coarseness of the Jewish accents. Thus Spielberg turns his Jewish characters into foreigners, despite the film taking place in their homeland of Poland. By sonically alienating the Jews, he implies that Poland naturally belongs to the Germans. This may have been a conscious, artistic choice of Spielberg’s, but even so, it leads the viewer to see *Schindler’s List* unequivocally through Germans eyes.

It is even harder to find reason in the behavioral stereotypes that Spielberg presents. Sara Horowitz notes how Spielberg plays on stereotypes of Jewish greed, having Jewish characters obsess over saving their valuables.³¹ During the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, for example, Spielberg shows women hiding valuable jewels in pieces of bread, committing their focus to their possessions over their own wellbeing. Other sequences further indulge the greed stereotype. In a group interview with *The Village Voice*, “Maus” author Art Spiegelman was not alone when he described Spielberg’s Jewish characters as

“slightly gentrified versions of Julius Streicher’s *Der Sturmer* caricatures: the juiceless Jewish accountant, the Jewish seductress, and, most egregiously, the Jews bargaining and doing business inside a church.”³² It is true: one of the early sequences in the film shows three Jewish men running a black market in the pews during a Catholic mass. This, in playing off the stereotype of Jewish materialism, is offensive enough. However, it is made worse when juxtaposed with Schindler’s values. Spielberg makes it clear that Schindler incurred massive financial losses as he bribed officials to protect his Jewish factory workers. This almost saintly rejection of materialism again elicits the Christlike comparison, and is a clear foil to the perverse Jewish values that Spielberg presents. When considering the economic concerns about Schindler as a historical figure, Spielberg’s choices become even more questionable. With such distasteful shortcomings, it becomes considerably more difficult to view *Schindler’s List* in any way as respectful form of memory for the victims, and specifically the Jewish victims, of the Holocaust.

Despite its faults, *Schindler’s List* remains celebrated as a cultural touchstone in the American cinematic tradition. As recently as 2008, the American Film Institute ranked it as the third greatest epic film of all time, trailing only *Lawrence of Arabia*

30 Rosenbaum, “Gentle Persuasion.”

31 Horowitz, “But Is It Good,” 119-39.

32 J. Hoberman et al, “Schindler’s List: Myth, Movie, and Memory,” *The Village Voice*, March 29, 1994, 24-31.

and *Ben Hur*.³³ Aesthetically beautiful and culturally memorable, *Schindler’s List* will likely continue to top such lists for year to come. Spielberg’s cinematic talent yielded a product that, in many regards, is a masterpiece. But it might simply be impossible to perfectly capture the Holocaust in a successful, narrative film. The traits that make for a Hollywood Blockbuster are often at odds with the core values of Holocaust memory. Thus, as a form of Holocaust memory, it is inevitably doomed to fall short. Despite all of my criticisms, I actually like *Schindler’s List* a great deal, but I like it merely as a movie. Viewed in the context of Jewish memory, it becomes far more complicated. Spielberg made this film as a form of Holocaust memory, and that is surely the role it plays in contemporary American culture. To many Americans, *Schindler’s List* is the sole exposure they have to the Holocaust. To put so much value, pressure, and scrutiny on a mere three-hour film is bound to expose flaws.

Regarding the depiction of the Holocaust in film, it is common for scholars to explore the question of whether or not the undertaking was worth it. I feel I am in no position to answer that question for *Schindler’s List*, nor do I wish to. I further hope that I do not indict Oskar Schindler, the true, historical figure, too harshly. Complicated character aside,

Schindler acted bravely and justly in a time where few else did. He deserves to be remembered as a hero, because that is what he is. In my criticisms, I only wish to point out the film is not without its shortcomings, and that, because of these shortcomings, the film cannot adequately satisfy the demands of Holocaust memory that it sets out to achieve. Later in life, Spielberg established the *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*, an organization dedicated to preserving memory through oral testimony of survivors.³⁴ This project is a far more fitting testament to the memory of the Holocaust and its individual victims. Perhaps, in starting this foundation, Spielberg realized the shortcomings of *Schindler’s List*, the constraints inherent in Hollywood film as a medium for remembering. It is likely impossible to fully satisfy the standards of memory within any such Hollywood film. In this regard, *Schindler’s List* was destined to fail from the start.

33 “AFI’s Top 10 Epic Films of All Time.” *American Film Institute: 10 Top 10*, American Film Institute, 2008, www.aifi.com/10top10/category.aspx?cat=10.

34 Jeffrey Shandler, “Schindler’s Discourse,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*, edited by Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 153–168.

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Max Beckmann's Suffering:

Art, Faith, and the Tortured German State in the First World War

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INTRODUCTION -

“[T]here’s a big demand for our dear old good Lord again now,”¹ wrote Max Beckmann from East Prussia in 1914, having recently joined the German war effort as a volunteer medical orderly. Despite his critical stance towards organized religion, Beckmann invariably returned throughout his career to faith, combining traditional Christian imagery with a more personal spirituality. As a result of his shifting style both in painting technique and subject matter, as a response to his involvement in World War I, and as an ambivalence towards “the new art” that emphasized realism, Beckmann’s work often confounds art historians who struggle to situate him within a Modernist tradition.² It is perhaps for this reason that while Beckmann was one of the most prominent figures of twentieth-century art,³ he is also one of the lesser-known artists to the general public.

Illustrating his blended style,

Descent from the Cross (1917) [Figure 1]⁴



depicts the suffering of Christ as he is being taken from the cross. Unlike most medieval and expressionist depictions of Crucifixions, Beckmann’s painting does not offer a sense of hope. Despite its use of religious imagery, the work carries a message that is more political than religious, illustrating Beckmann’s negative view of an increasingly secular post-World War I German society. Beckmann incorporated traditional religious iconography inspired by late

1 Max Beckmann and Barbara Copeland Buenger, *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words: Collected Writings and Statements, 1903-1950*, ed. Barbara Copeland Buenger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 140.

2 Reinhard Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950: The Path to Myth* (Köln: Taschen, 2002), 23.

3 Robert Storr, *Max Beckmann June 26-September 29, 2003* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), Exhibition catalogue, 1.

4 Max Beckmann, *Descent from the Cross*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 59 ½ x 50 ¾. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, donation Curt Valentin Bequest.

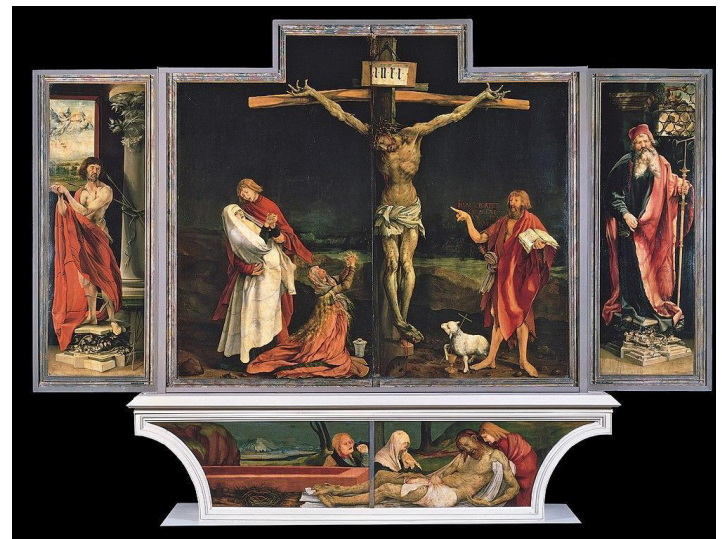
Gothic and Northern Renaissance art, as well as newer techniques of expressionism and cubism. He subtly rearranges the logic of redemption so that instead of Christ's bearing humanity's sins, humanity bears his. Beckmann's *Descent from the Cross* transforms both religious and contemporary forms in the service of a secular, anti-nationalist critique of both German society and the contemporary human condition.

Beckmann created *Descent from the Cross* in 1917 during his career's least-productive period, which spanned from 1915 to 1918. In trying to account for Beckmann's decline in productivity during this time, Reinhard Spieler argues that Beckmann was struggling, in the midst of war, to find the "right form."⁵ Traditional academic styles, like those found in the Old Masters and Impressionism, were "no longer an adequate means of expression."⁶ Spieler asserts that following the war, academic forms did not provide Beckmann with the proper language to express the intensity of his new experiences during the war. The academic style Beckmann previously followed reflected a feudal society destroyed by the war.⁷ It might also be said that he was looking

for new sources of inspiration. Beckmann's prewar works reflected on human drama and its various manifestations by focusing on historical, biblical or mythological drama, as a way of expressing "humanity's unending fight for survival, the tragedy of human existence."⁸

GRUNEWALD'S *ISENHEIM ALTARPIECE*: GOTHIC ART AND GERMAN MODERNISM -

It was not uncommon during this and the postwar period for artists to return to late-Gothic and Northern Renaissance art.⁹ The dialogue with the art of past and Beckmann's interest in German-Gothic painting is essential to understanding not only his postwar work, but also



5 Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950*, 28.

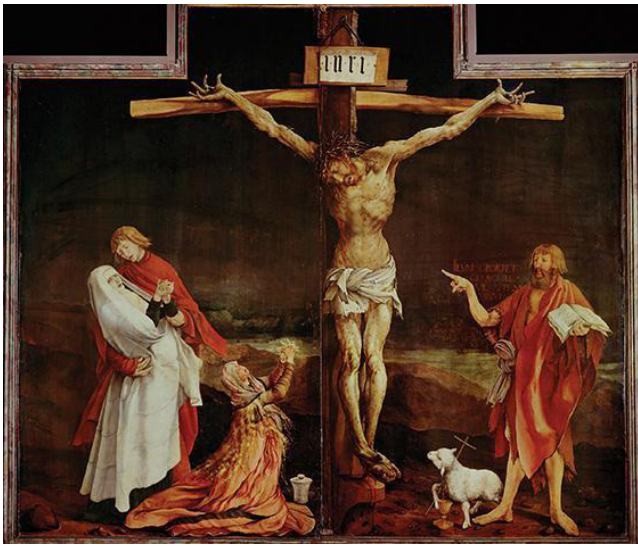
6 Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950*, 28.

7 Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950*, 28.

8 Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950*, 15-16. Beckmann's early work is important more for complexity of content and forceful expression than for development of successful new forms of expression. His prewar works were representations of the melodrama found in human life as a way of referencing points of the human struggle: death and eternal life. Beckmann went beyond representations of individual tragedy and began depicting scenes of historical, biblical and mythological drama. While it is hard to pin down Beckmann's exact style, Spieler notes that the style of his early works were located between the painting of the academy and the free Impressionist manner. Beckmann used Impressionism as a way of heightening expression.

9 Storr, *Max Beckmann June 26-September 29, 2003*, Exhibition catalogue, 26.

that of twentieth-century German artists—particularly those of the Expressionists. Northern Medieval and Renaissance art—specifically Medieval depictions of the Crucifixion, such as Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* [Figure 2]¹⁰—emphasized the bodily suffering of Christ and man’s redemption by way of the Resurrection; this work functioned to fulfill a healing purpose, seen as hope for the future.¹¹ In *The Crucifixion* [Figure 3]¹², the central and largest panel of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, Grünewald depicts his Crucified Christ in a moment of agony; his greenish skin is covered with open wounds and thorns, and the whole scene is saturated in the dim light of a solar eclipse.



Additionally, Grünewald presents a version of Christ

that is frighteningly realistic and heroic in size, as the “natural scale has been ignored. The huge body of Christ fills the entire central area with an overpowering monumentality.”¹³

Grünewald’s Crucified Christ is one of the most gruesome and disturbing images of the body of Christ in the history of Western art, with the green coloration of the dead flesh, the countless sores and pricks in the torso, the distorted limbs torn from their sockets and joints, and the agonizing rigor mortis that has twisted and contorted Christ’s hands and feet. Grünewald presents a unique, harrowing portrayal of the crucifixion, drastically breaking convention. Furthermore, Grünewald shows disinterest in hieratic scale—the visual method of marking the significance of a figure through its size in relation to others on the picture plane—with the various, disproportionate sizes of the religious figures below the cross.¹⁴ Most other medieval images of the crucifixion depicted Mary as the second largest figure, aside from Jesus, because of her divine nature. The hieratic scale that “distinguishes Mary from her devotees by depicting her twice as tall [...] than the supplicants under her mantle functions to separate her sacred realm from the secular world

10 Matthias Grünewald. *Isenheim Altarpiece (Crucifixion)*, ca. 1510-15. Oil on panel. Center panel: 9' 9 1/2" x 10' 9" (289.56 x 327.66 cm).

11 Andrée Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece: God's Medicine and the Painter's Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 24.

12 Zoomed in: Matthias Grünewald. *Isenheim Altarpiece (Crucifixion)*, ca. 1510-15. Oil on panel.

13 James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1305 to 1575* (New York: Harry N. Abraham, Inc., 1985), 349.

14 In the context of religion, divine figures are portrayed much larger than the mortals.

of those whom she protects.”¹⁵ This difference in scale “reinforc[es] stratification between the secular and sacred.”¹⁶ Rather than the scale, Grünewald emphasizes the emotions of the religious figures and the depiction of their bodies—such as the tiny figure of Mary Magdalen weeping convulsively while wringing her hands in grief. This mastery of light, color, and line as a way of expressing inner feeling are the reasons why Grünewald became the ideal of the new generation of artists.

Many German Expressionists turned to Grünewald’s work for inspiration. They saw Grünewald’s work as capturing “a freedom of creation following the intrinsic logic of content and composition rather than nature,”¹⁷ meaning that Grünewald let the emotional and spiritual reality he wanted to depict guide his compositional choices. They felt that he had the ability to penetrate the core of human emotion and create truth that went far beyond the illusion of reality. Influenced by Grünewald’s artistic style, the Expressionists determined the size and proportions of the figures they painted by their significance in the event, rather than by anatomical considerations;¹⁸ like their medieval

forebears, the Expressionists were “not primarily interested in representationalism.”¹⁹ Additionally, it was characteristic of Expressionist art to use color and form as the main tools to portray expression, with the purpose of evoking extreme pathos from the viewer.

Beckmann, like countless other artists, traveled to Colmar, Germany during the early twentieth century in order to see Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece*.²⁰ Grünewald’s *Crucifixion* would have a profound effect on Beckman’s post-1916 work, specifically on *Descent from the Cross*. When the war began, Beckman wrote to Wilhelm von Bode, the director at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, asking that the piece be moved to Berlin in order to protect it.

GERMAN ART: NATIONAL SENTIMENT AND IDEOLOGY -

This lineage that the Expressionists claimed through Grünewald and the Northern Gothic tradition also had strong nationalist overtones; Beckmann would have been well aware of this. Art historian Wilhelm Worringer had traced Germany’s artistic roots to the “Northern” vision, which he believed manifested itself in abstraction through form, color, and transcendence. He remarked that “the Gothic

15 Katherine T. Brown, “Iconographic Origins as a Devotional Image,” In *Mary of Mercy in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Art: Devotional Image and Civic Emblem* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 104.

16 Brown, “Iconographic Origins,” In *Mary of Mercy*, 105.

17 Peter Selz, *German Expression Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 17.

18 Selz, *German Expression Painting*, 13.

19 Selz, *German Expression Painting*, 18.

20 Beckmann and Buenger, *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 73.

form-will had always existed as a sort of mystic undercurrent in German art.”²¹ Worringer linked Expressionism with the German-Gothic tradition, and particularly Grünewald, thus denying that France could be the founder of the Gothic style. When Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* was rediscovered after centuries of oblivion, it became pivotal to a new generation of artists, art historians, and critics who returned to Gothic art forms as a means of reclaiming German national pride.

This uniquely German-Gothic ethos showed itself in a consciousness of death, emotionality, monumentality, and an inclination towards violent desire over classical balance—meaning that the Gothic style, as opposed to classical, became a more adequate means of expression during these restless and excited cultural movements of the early twentieth century. Rest, balance, and happiness belonged to Classical Greek art and architecture and, by extension, the French, who drew heavily on classical motifs. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Germany concentrated on reinforcing its military power over the French, having previously won the Franco-Prussian War, and also emphasizing the superiority of uniquely German art and cultural initiatives. The German Expressionists saw themselves as participating in this uniquely German triumph, and this nationalism would have registered as inseparable from their aesthetic

vocabulary.

A SHIFT IN VISUAL CULTURE: BECKMANN AND GERMAN ARTISTS -

Beginning in 1916, however, the visual culture began to shift. The initial years of war euphoria faded. With the stalemate on the Western front in the Summer of 1917, the internal dissent at its highest levels, and the failure of the Spring Offensive in 1918, Germany began to crumble, while art began to reflect a growing dismay through themes of sacrifice, death and destruction. Beckmann highlights the growing despair in Germany in his *Descent from the Cross* (1917); however, he was not the only German Expressionist to depict the themes of martyrdom, suffering, and destruction.

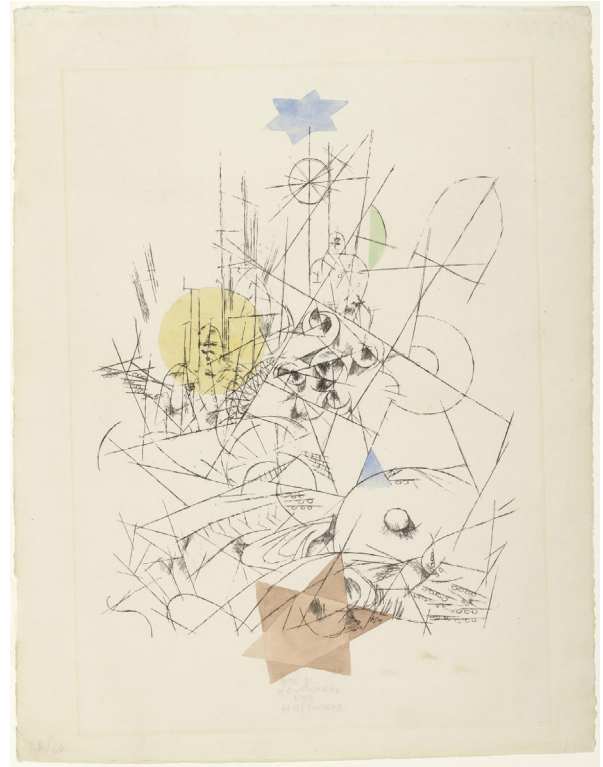


For example, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s *Self-Portrait as*

²¹ Selz, *German Expression Painting*, 14.

Soldier (c. 1915) [Figure 4]²² is not a real self-portrait, but a social image used “to represent the wounded, the mutilated, the disfigured” and “the actual extent of the horrors of war” in ways that “defy depiction.”²³ The figure in the painting wears a uniform and is missing a right hand, signifying his inability to paint or interact with society. This is the “artist as exemplary sufferer”; he “represents innumerable victims” and “simulates the consequences of the military and of war on his own body”²⁴ Here, the artist’s suffering represents the greater suffering of society.

While some artists, like Kirchner, turned to representations of the tortured body to express their disaffection, others, like Paul Klee, turned to abstraction. The nationalist state conscripted Klee, along with many of his artistic, anti-war peers, to military service. Aligning himself with other Expressionists, Klee opposed naturalism, yet promoted abstraction at a time when it was not popular. Klee accompanies his works with suggestive titles that point away from abstraction.²⁵ His lithograph *Destruction and Hope* (1916) [Figure 5]²⁶ presents a form of abstraction through



its geometric arrangements and cubism in the midst of chaos. The simple, large color silhouettes, including figures of a half-moon, two hexagram stars, and a circle (perhaps the sun) convey a hope of creating something positive in the midst of destruction.²⁷ These shapes are filled with yellow, green, and blue watercolors. The finished lithography is an expression of the contrast between destruction and hope with the black geometric yet chaotic lines juxtaposing the light, warm watercolor shapes. The image is both

22 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. *Self-Portrait as Soldier*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas. 27 ¼ x 24” (69 x 61 cm).

23 Peter Springer, “The Artist as Exemplary Sufferer,” In *Hand and Head: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s Self-portrait as a Soldier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 69.

24 In Peter Springer’s essay “The Artist as Exemplary Sufferer,” Springer references Susan Sontag’s concept of “the artist as exemplary sufferer” in his analysis of Kirchner’s artistic self-fashioning in his *Self-Portrait as Soldier* (c.1915). Sontag’s notion is used by Springer to show the social dimension of Kirchner’s work and how the artist represents a secular martyr, a victim, of the “death, annihilation, destruction, and injury that accompany war.” Further explained on pg. 69 of Springer’s essay.

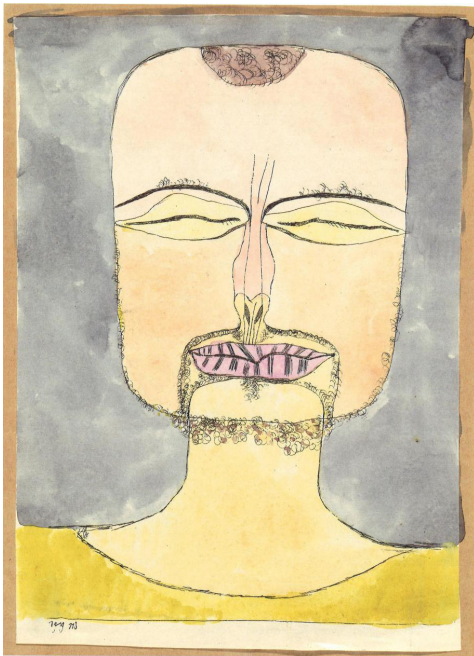
25 Paul Jaskot, Lecture, Art History 460S from Duke University, Durham, NC, September 11, 2018.

26 Paul Klee. *Destruction and Hope*, 1916. Lithograph with watercolor and pencil additions. 13 18 x 13 ”(46.7 x 33.1 cm). Photo: © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

27 Otto Karl Werckmeister, “1916,” In *The Making of Paul Klee’s Career* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 84.

deconstructive and constructive as Klee incorporates fragmented and complete shapes and lines in order to convey some glimmer of positivity in the midst of devastation. There was not one aesthetic direction, then, that artists in the immediate postwar period were taking to reckon with the destruction that had occurred.

In the aftermath of the war, spirituality seemed like the only recourse of Germany’s artists. Klee was among those who turned toward spirituality following World War I. In *After the Drawing 19/75* [Absorption] (1919) [Figure 6]²⁸, he depicts a



central figure with closed eyes in a seemingly peaceful state. The image directly contrasts to Kirchner’s

tortured, mutilated *Self-Portrait of Soldier*. The subject represents the need for a spiritual withdrawal, not as an escape, but as a transformation or regeneration to rise to a better place. By depicting the figure with his eyes closed, Klee emphasizes the need to look within oneself in order to experience a transformation.

Like his compatriots Kirchner and Klee, Beckman too served in the war. While he set himself apart from many of his contemporaries in that he “did not have a method or codified formal approach to profess,”²⁹ he did share their interest in addressing the effects of war. At the war’s end, Beckmann turned to religious themes, combining them with both past and present artistic forms in a way that allowed him to offer a subversive reading of the traditions of which he was a part.

Karl Schmidt Rottluff had also turned to religious imagery as a way of seeking spiritual solace. Like Beckmann, he engaged himself in a subtle game of subversion; unlike Beckmann, however, he turned away from the expressiveness of painting. Between 1917 and 1919, he turned largely to woodcuts, a medium associated strongly with German nationalism.³⁰ In the words of one art

28 Paul Klee, *After the Drawing 19/75 [Absorption]*, 1919. Lithograph, hand-coloured in watercolour. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, donation of Livia Klee. Photo:© Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Bildarchiv.

29 Robert Storr, “The Beckmann Effect,” In *Max Beckmann*, ed. Sean Rainbird (London: Tate Publ., 2003), 11.

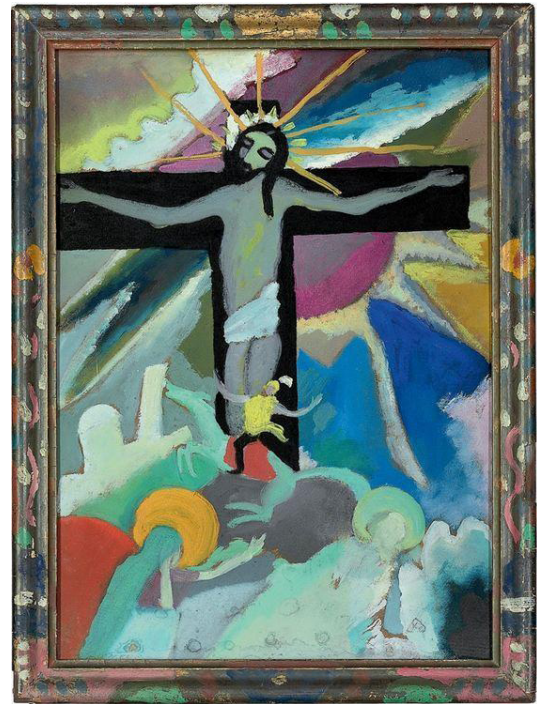
30 Artists found an immediate connection to German medieval art through the woodcut, a medium used in the late Medieval and early Renaissance period. As a result of historical connection between medieval and gothic art and the Expressionist movement by Worringer, the woodcut became a visual icon of Germanness.

historian, Joan Weinstein,³¹ woodcuts “eliminated the more personalized features of earlier drawings and lithographs, making the image more timeless and universal.”³² Through the mediums of woodcuts and religious imagery, Schmidt Rottluff could transcend the personalized expression of painting and present the viewer with a more objective, timeless representation of his war experience. In conveying the suffering of war in a medium with such nationalist overtones, however, he offered a subtly subversive anti-nationalist statement. Beckmann’s use of Gothic religious imagery from Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* in *Descent from the Cross* would invoke a similarly anti-nationalist stance. Both artists subverted either their chosen medium or traditional subject matter.

OTHER PREWAR DEPICTIONS OF CHRIST -

Similar to other German Expressionists who served in the war, Beckmann’s postwar work reflected the immense suffering, disfigured soldiers, and death he had witnessed. Nevertheless, Beckmann set himself apart from the work of Wassily Kandinsky and Emil Nolde, who painted the *Crucifixion*

prior to the war, by painting a deposition. Both Kandinsky’s *Crucified Christ*, 1911 [Figure 7]³³



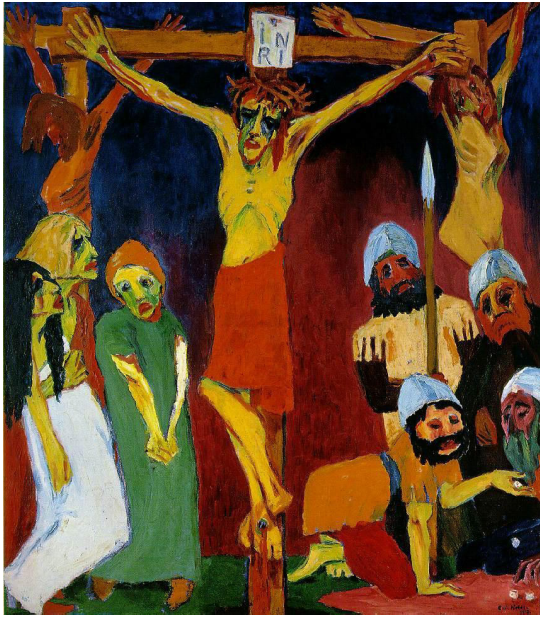
and Nolde’s *Crucifixion*, 1912 [Figure 8]³⁴ offered some form of hope, either through color and form or by the other paintings in dialogue with Christ’s suffering. In Kandinsky’s image, he conveys optimism through his use of color and his depiction of the body of Christ, which does not show any signs of bodily harm. When viewed alone, Nolde’s *Crucifixion* seems like a nightmarish scene as it confronts the viewer with a grotesque image of Christ’s suffering.

31 In Joan Weinstein’s essay “Käthe Kollwitz, the First World War, and Sacrifice,” In *Nothing but the Clouds Unchanged: Artists in World War I*, ed. Gordon Hughes and Philipp Blom (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2014), 146-155, she not only discusses the woodcut in terms of Kollwitz’s work but also talks about the broader context of the medium.

32 In Weinstein’s essay referenced in the previous footnote, she discusses on page 152 how Kollwitz turned to the woodcut for her 1923 portfolio *War* after struggling for years “to give aesthetic form to the war experience. In her 1922 letter to French pacifist writer Romain Rolland, she writes “Again and again I have tried to give shape to war. I was never able to capture it. Now finally I managed a series of woodcuts that express to some extent what I want to say...this is what it was like--this is what we endured during these unspeakably hard years.”

33 Wassily Kandinsky. *Crucified Christ*, 1911. Oil on cardboard. 14.2 x 10.1” (36.0 x 25.6 cm).

34 Emil Nolde. *Crucifixion*, 1912. Oil on canvas. 87 x 76.2” (220.5 x 193.5 cm).



However, one must view his image within the context of the other eight paintings of the *Life of Christ* in order to see how Nolde offers a redemptive quality through depicting scenes from Christ's life. These images were both painted before World War I, when nationalistic fervor and pro-war campaigns permeated German culture, and when Expressionism connected to a patriotic mindset through Grünewald's influence.

In Kandinsky's *Crucified Christ*, 1911, the emphasis is clearly on the artist's use of color. Kandinsky believed color was the most powerful medium in the hand of the painter, and his color was based on neither the physical laws of color nor upon the psychology of color vision. Kandinsky does not emphasize the bodily suffering of Christ as seen in medieval depictions of the Crucifixion (i.e. Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*). Instead, he uses color as a vehicle of inner-feeling and rhythmic harmony. The mix of cool colors and warm, the yellow

rays stemming from the Christ's head at the top of the cross, and the figure dressed in yellow riding across the scene at the foot of the cross convey a redemptive quality.

Emil Nolde's *Crucifixion* of 1912 certainly reflects the tortured flesh of Northern Gothic tradition in the form of an emaciated body with prominent wounds and streams of blood. He brings the agony of Christ's body and the sufferance of the other characters to their extreme. Nolde's dynamic and pungent red—juxtaposed by the coldness of purplish blue—deviates from tradition and aligns with the Expressionist movement. Jesus' hair and the crown of thorns are red, as well as his cloak. There is no redemptive or hopeful quality evident in this image of the Crucifixion, but Nolde has situated the image in the context of a redemptive narrative. The *Crucifixion* is one of nine paintings in his polyptych, *The Life of Christ*. In context, especially when viewed in relation to the resurrection of Christ, Nolde's painting is ultimately a step along a more hopeful journey.

Beckmann emerges from the same context and artistic conversations as Kirchner, Klee, Schmidt-Rottluff, Nolde, and Kandinsky when depicting works of art that carried spiritual, religious, nationalist, or anti-nationalist sentiments through composition, color, and tonality. Unlike Klee's lithographs, Beckmann's *Descent from the Cross* (1917) offers neither a positive element in the midst of destruction nor the possibility

for human transformation following the war. He does, like Klee, integrate elements of abstraction as a way of articulating the fracturing of German society during and after the war. He also, like Kirchner, aims to represent the despair in Germany by linking the personal suffering of the artist to the tortured German state. But if Kirchner's self-portrait is a commentary on the act of self-portraiture, then Beckmann's *Descent from the Cross* is a form of commentary on religious painting. Beckmann's "religious" works were distinct from other depictions of the Crucifixions such as Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*, as well as Kandinsky and Nolde's prewar representations of the Crucifixions. Beckmann does not offer hope; for this Christ, there is no Resurrection.

LITERATURE ON *DESCENT FROM THE CROSS*, 1917 AND BECKMANN'S POSTWAR ARTISTIC PHILOSOPHY -

When Georg Swarzenski, the director of the Städtische Galerie in Frankfurt, acquired and published Beckmann's work in 1919,³⁵ art critics immediately recognized it as a reaction to the suffering of German society and soldiers in World War

I. Julius Meier-Graefe, the founder of the *Ganymed Press* commented on Beckmann's painting in 1919, stating that he did not see any form, but rather the wounds of all those defeated in the war—mighty, manifold, and personal not unlike Grünewald's vision of medieval horror.³⁶ Meier-Graefe describes this image as a metaphor for the wounds of the fallen soldiers, supporting Spieler's interpretation that *Descent from the Cross* functions as an image for the bitter war experience.³⁷ The same year, Heinrich Simon published his view in *Das Kunstblatt* 3, 1919, stating that pleasing beauty could not be found in the painting and that anyone who recovers from life rested and refreshed should stay away from these pictures.³⁸ Neither devotion nor aesthetic pleasures are found in Beckmann's work. Lastly, Siegfried Kracauer expressed the impact of the *Descent from the Cross* in *Der Rheinland* 31, in 1921, describing Beckman's visualization of despair, death and hopelessness:

Despair and nothing but despair lurches forth from this image. Love has disappeared from the world, even the death of the most precious is meaningless. Nothingness [or: the nothing] lives behind the grayness that surrounds us,

35 MoMA Provenance Research Project, "Max Beckmann *Descent from the Cross* 1917," MoMA: Provenance Research Project, 2001, accessed September 1, 2018. The painting was first acquired by Georg Hartmann but then returned to the Beckmann's studio. It was then purchased from Beckmann under Georg Swarzenski, the director of the Städelsche Galerie, in 1919. It was then seized as "degenerate art by the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda on October 26, 1936. It was exhibited in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* in 1937 in Munich and other venues. *Descent from the Cross*, 1917 was included in the exhibition *Landmarks in Modern German Art*, Buchholz Gallery, New York, April 2-27, 1940. In 1955, it was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York through Curt Valentin's Bequest.

36 Klaus Gallwitz, ed. *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933. Eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Städtisches Kunstinstitut, 1983), 72.

37 Gallwitz, *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933*, 72.

38 Gallwitz, *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933*, 72.

and no promise breaks through to us from the higher domains any longer. This is how this artist sees our time, and one has to grant it to him, that he knows how to exorcise its [time’s] entire misery in mercilessness, which stops at nothing and enunciated with utter clarity the most abominable [as a noun; horrible etc.].³⁹

Kracauer remarks that “this artist sees our time,” underscoring how Beckmann is aware of and commenting on the increasing anxiety and despair as the war comes to an end. Though Beckmann uses religious imagery, it was clear to his contemporaries that the painting is a reflection of the immediate postwar reality.

Beckmann’s *Creative Credo*, written in the summer of 1918, is a response to the widespread and increasing disenchantment with the war and he speaks bitterly of the war, as well as the materialism and selfishness that it carried. Beckmann associated objectivity with the decline of materialism, seeing it as a way to free oneself from the materialism and selfishness that modernism and the war perpetuated. He presented himself as an artist engaged in a relentless struggle with the “monster of life’s vitality.”⁴⁰ Although the *Creative Credo* was written after Beckmann painted the *Descent from the Cross*, his writing closely “echoes the optimism about a new order that was widely held in the war’s last years,”⁴¹

which is most likely seen in his post-1918 works.

Therefore, one can analyze *Descent from the Cross* (1917), in terms of the style and message art should convey to the viewer outlined in his writing.

Throughout his *Credo*, the overall message Beckmann seems to stress is that art needed a stronger relationship with reality, but not with realism. He strongly emphasizes that art must shift away from the art of the past, stating that he would “certainly hope we are finished with much of the past. Finished with the mindless imitation of visible reality; finished with feeble, archaistic, and empty decoration, and finished with that fate, sentimental, and swooning mysticism! I hope we will achieve a transcendental objectivity out of a deep love for nature and humanity.”⁴² Here, Beckmann stands in opposition to common art styles of the Modern era. He critiques abstract and decorative painting, the thoughtless imitation of the visible as taught, and the swooning mysticism with its sentimental and emotional art. Instead, Beckmann hopes for and refers to a “transcendent meaning” that an artwork should provide the viewer and praising an art style that inflected realism combined with transcendence.

Beckmann wanted artists to be inspired by the reality of modern life without getting caught up

39 Gallwitz, *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933*, 72

40 Beckmann and Buenger, “Creative Credo,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 182.

41 Beckmann and Buenger, “Creative Credo,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 182.

42 Beckmann and Buenger, “Creative Credo,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 185.

in realism. He loved humanity and wanted to show something of its core: “it’s stupid to love humanity, nothing but a heap of egoism (and we are a part of it too). But I love it anyway. I love its meanness, its banality, its dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare heroism.”⁴³ With the depiction of a common and arguably universally-known biblical scene, Beckmann uses religious imagery to shed light on something that is both contemporary and essential to human nature.

DESCENT FROM THE CROSS: COLOR AND FORM -

Beckmann’s images are extremely intense and elicit an emotional response from the viewer by drawing upon expressionist styles through the distortion of space, the deformed figures, and the vehement color. The thin, two-dimensional figures in the *Descent from the Cross* create the space that recedes and advances with them in a zigzag motion. The large body of Christ extends diagonally across the plane. His emaciated arms stretch across the picture and in their rigor mortis still mirror the shape of the cross.⁴⁴ The perspective is interesting in this painting as the soldiers on the left are viewed from below, while the kneeling mourning women on the lower right are seen from above. The twist of perspectives

forces the viewer’s eye to return constantly to the pale figure of Christ who, with his arms radiating from his angular body, is both cold and dead and at the center of the painting’s life-force. The tortured anatomy of Christ’s body underscores the influence of Gothic art and “perfects his hybrid of an anachronistic and quasi-Cubistic figuration, while nuancing his sometimes gratingly colorful, sometimes blanched palette.”⁴⁵ The blood coming from the wounds is highlighted by the distortion in size of Christ’s hands and feet, and by the contrast Beckmann provides through the deep red of his wounds and the pale gray, green color of Christ’s skin. The representation of Christ’s wounds force the viewer to connect with the physical suffering undertaken on his or her behalf, echoing Jesus’ statement from the Last Supper in Luke chapter twenty-two verse nineteenth, “This is My body, given for you.”⁴⁶ This emphasis upon suffering exhibits the Gothic influence.

Beckmann also conveys the impact of Gothic art through the narrow, compressed, stage-like space that shows the importance of pictorial and psychological context rather than natural, scientific laws of perspective that determine the size of the figures. Additionally, the greenish tone of Christ’s body mirrors Christ’s body in the Isenheim Altarpiece.

43 Beckmann and Buenger, “Creative Credo,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 184.

44 Heather Hess, “German Expressionist Digital Archive Project,” *German Expressionism Works from the Collection*, 2001.

45 Sean Rainbird, “Images of the Times in Beckmann’s Early Work,” In *Max Beckmann*, ed. Sean Rainbird (London: Tate Publ., 2003), 11.

46 Luke. 22. 19. New International Version.

Like the Gothic painters, Beckmann is interested in the viewer’s emotional response to an unflinching look at bodily suffering—a relevant topic in the midst of a seemingly never-ending war.

Although Christ is the central figure, Beckmann draws the viewer’s attention to the two groups of people, divided by a ladder, on each side of the painting. He particularly accentuates the figure on the right, who looks directly towards the viewer. Beckmann uses this direct, emotional connection between a subject in the painting and the viewer to adapt the Gothic project of visceral emotional response to his own end. Notably, the viewer most sympathizes not with Beckmann’s Christ, but with an onlooker.

In a letter from March 2, 1915, when he was stationed in Courtrai, Beckmann writes to his wife, Minna Beckmann-Tube, “There are some remarkable people and faces among them, many of whom I like and all of whom I will sketch. Course, bony faces with an intelligent expression and wonderfully primitive, unspoiled points of view.”⁴⁷ The reference to the bony, primitive expression on the faces Beckmann saw during the war influenced him whilst depicting the figures in *Descent from the Cross*, as Jesus’s face is

almost ape-like and his cheeks are very defined and sharp. Similarly, the faces of the figures holding him as well as the women on the ground seem to adopt this angular and bony appearance discussed in Beckmann’s letter.

In his letters, Beckmann often compares the suffering he saw during the war to the suffering of Christ. In a letter from Castle Mlawka on September 16, 1914, he writes, “I helped with the autopsy of another man who died last night. He looked much like my model for the Lamentation of Christ, had a grand sallow profile.”⁴⁸ He draws a similar comparison in a letter from Wervicq on May 4, 1915: “I saw some remarkable things. In the semi darkness of the shelter, half-naked, blood-covered men that were having white bandages applied. Grand and painful in expression. New visions of scourgings of Christ.”⁴⁹ Beckmann used this imagery in the face of his avowed anti-clericism. To say that the soldiers he sees represent “new visions” of Biblical violence is not to make a claim about the necessity of the church but to make a claim about the nature of the contemporary violence. Beckmann sees suffering in terms of religious imagery as a way of judging religion or taking a religious stance.

47 Beckmann and Buenger, “Wartime Letters: Belgium (Courtrai, Roeselare, Ostende) (February 24–March 16, 1915),” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 146.

48 Beckmann and Buenger, “Wartime Letters: East Prussia (September 14–October 11, 1914),” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 167.

49 Beckmann and Buenger, “Wartime Letters: Belgium (Roeselare, Wervicq, Brussels) (March 20–June 12, 1915),” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 167.

Beckmann's experience in war didn't impacted not only the themes and images he conveyed, but also the colors and form of his figures. Beckmann's letters capture the distortion of space and figures that he would later incorporate into his painting: "Everything in disorder. Staggering shadows. Majestically rose and ash-colored limbs with dirty white of the bandages and the somber, heavy expression of suffering."⁵⁰ The tortured anatomy of Christ, the crowded space, and the distorted figures all feel characteristic of the trench experience. Even the painting's dark, desolate background projects like a self-abnegation related to the experience of combat. On June 8, 1915, Wervicq, Beckmann writes, "Oh, I wish I could paint again. Color's after all an instrument that one can't do without for long. All I have to do is just think of gray, green, and white, or of black-yellow, sulfur yellow, and violet, and a shudder of pleasure runs through me. Then I wish the war were over and I could paint."⁵¹ If Beckmann was craving color, he refused to indulge that desire in *Descent from the Cross*, which features an ashy, bleak background.

SUFFERING OF CHRIST AND THE TORTURED GERMAN STATE -

In *Descent from the Cross*, Beckmann's Christ is a profane Christ, and his body becomes a site through which Beckmann expresses which social, religious, and political concerns. Through his relative arrangement of the body and the cross, Beckmann has secularized a somewhat traditional image of the Crucifixion. One of the most noticeable aspects of the painting is what initially seems to be an absence of the cross. However, further inspection reveals the object behind the ladder to be a traditional variant of the cross shape called the Tau Cross⁵² [Figure 9]⁵³.



The Tau Cross represents the style of Cross venerated by St. Francis, the healing virtues associated with the form, and "the redemptive powers of Christ's death

50 Beckmann and Buenger, "Wartime Letters: Belgium (Roeselare, Wervicq, Brussels) (March 20-June 12, 1915)," In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 176.

51 Beckmann and Buenger, "Wartime Letters: Belgium (Roeselare, Wervicq, Brussels) (March 20-June 12, 1915)," In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 176.

52 Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, 37.

53 Saint Francis (fourteenth-century copy after autograph, Sacro Convento, Assisi), *Signum tau cum capite*, Assisi MS 344. (From J.V. Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini: An Essay in Franciscan Exegesis* [Princeton: 1982], fig. 25)

on the cross.”⁵⁴ Additionally, the Tau is significant in the context of the crucifixion iconography as the Old Testament symbol of salvation.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the Tau Cross is neither prominent nor easy to locate in the painting. The cross becomes part of the background, rather than being the central symbol. It is overpowered by the size of Christ’s tortured body, which seems to be Beckmann’s way of communicating to the reader that salvation and the redemptive powers traditionally associated with the Tau should not be considered. In comparing the size and location of the Tau cross, small and obscured in the background, with Christ’s body, prominent and in the foreground, Beckmann seemingly replaces the Tau by having Christ represent and become the “new” cross. In this depiction, the themes of sacrifice, suffering, and death are hard to ignore, and they prevail over healing and redemption as the Tau Cross recedes into the background.

Therefore, only Christ’s stiff body and the extended arms and feet remind the viewer of the important object symbol of Christianity, while his tortured, emaciated body becomes emblematic of the larger suffering within German society during and after

World War I.

Although Christ has been removed from the cross in the painting, his body still holds the cross’s form. In terms of traditional scale and weight, the two male figures lowering his body would be unable to hold a Christ that size. The men are forced to hold a massive Christ the way Christ was forced to bear a cross. In Beckmann’s painting, the figure of Christ itself becomes the cross humanity all must bear after the war. In the scriptures, the cross represents the human sins, which Christ had to bear before he ultimately sacrificed himself to save humanity from its sins. Beckmann conveys that humanity must bear Christ as a burden. Humans not only now carry all the suffering and sins of humanity, but also must struggle to bear the capacity to understand, experience, and empathize.

One can read Beckmann’s Christ as a representation of the Church in the social context of the twentieth century. In this regard, the choice to depict a deposition is crucial. Christ descends from the cross, thus becoming a figure for the decreasing role of the Church in modern society. Traditional,

54 Eugene A. Carroll, “The Tau Cross of Rosso’s Volterra ‘Deposition’,” Source: *Notes in the History of Art* 17, no. 1 (1997): 5, accessed December 7, 2018. In Carroll’s essay, he discusses the representation of the Tau Cross in Rosso’s *Deposition*. He discusses the iconography of the Tau, its association with Saint Francis, and where it is referenced in the Bible. Carroll argues on page five that through the “huge Tau Cross, Rosso’s *Deposition* can be identified as a particularly Franciscan image of redemption.” Although, Carroll notes on page six that no one in “Rosso’s *Deposition* recognizes the meaning of the Cross; only the distant worshipers...see Christ held up against that enormous Tau, the agent and sign of Christ’s triumph over death and the means of their salvation.” By applying this visual analysis to Beckmann’s *Descent from the Cross*, Christ is not held up against the Tau, nor does Beckmann place the Tau near above or near Christ as a way of conveying that Christ was previously situated against the Tau Cross. Because of these artistic choices, Beckmann seems to be conveying to the viewer that Christ is unable to triumph over death and save humanity.

55 Catherine Oakes et al., *Grove Art Online*, s.v. “Cross,” January 1, 2003, Introduction, accessed December 7, 2018.

Germanic images of Christ on the cross depict Christ at the height of his suffering. Beckmann's decision to paint a deposition and to place the ladder in the center of the image emphasize both the descent of Jesus and the aftermath of his passion. This narrative aligns with the decline of nationalistic sentiment in the latter stages of the war. Contemporary viewers would have been aware of the ways in which Beckmann invoked a Gothic tradition, replete with nationalist overtones, only to show the intensity of emotion at its center wane.

Beckmann's painting elevates his postwar moment to the level of timeless human experience, even as it offers no vision of hope. The darkened sun symbolizes utter despair, and just as the narrow space of his canvas does not leave much room for the figures to move, there is not much room for hope. This is reflective of his *Creative Credo*, where Beckmann writes, "The war has now dragged to a miserable end. But it hasn't changed my ideas about life in the least, it has only confirmed them. We are on our way to very difficult times [...]. We must be a part of all the misery that is coming."⁵⁶ Beckmann is aware that the suffering of German society will extend beyond the formal end of the war, and his secularized Christian imagery suggests a commentary on modern society at large. As Reinhard Spieler states, "By

blending Christian topoi such as the deposition, the man of sorrows, and the torturing mercenaries with contemporary types drawn from the commentary on his own time: the corruption and cruelty of postwar society is raised to a general and timeless level of human experience, to external night to humanity's hell on earth."

Additionally, Spieler highlights the ways in which Beckmann combined this biblical event with his personal experiences. For instance, if one accepts the argument given by the curators of the exhibition catalog *Max Beckmann. Frankfurt 1915-1933* that the figure on the left in *Descent from the Cross* is a depiction of Major von Braunbehrens, who was partly responsible for Beckmann's release from military service in 1915, this clearly aligns with Beckmann's goal of providing the viewer with personal and direct art, which he describes in his *Creative Credo*.⁵⁷ By fusing Christian iconography and biographical events, Beckmann's *Descent from the Cross* (1917) conveys both deeply personal and universal elements, eliciting an emotional response while making the viewer aware of the time.

For all that Beckmann was offering a cynical view of a declining Church, there is something sincere in the spiritual intensity of the painting. In August 1917, Gustav Hartlaub, the director of the Mannheim

⁵⁶ Beckmann and Buenger, "Creative Credo," In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 184.

⁵⁷ Gallwitz, *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933*, 72.

Kunsthalle, asked Beckmann to participate in his show of modern religious art *Neue religiöse Kunst* (1918).⁵⁸

Hartlaub was also amongst the art critics who doubted the affinity between medieval art and Expressionism as there was “no one pervasive religious belief that gave force and coherence to the symbolism of the Middle Ages.”⁵⁹ Although Beckmann did not participate in Hartlaub’s show for reasons unknown, he did express interest in Hartlaub’s ideas. Beckmann’s negative view of an increasingly secular post-World War I German society, as well as the previous German nationalistic sentiment the Modern Era created, prompted him to use anti-nationalist imagery. The widespread disenchantment with the war led to the departure from art being associated with national sentiment and ideology. As a result, “many Germans had come to reconsider older German art, now less from the nationalistic feelings that had moved them at the beginning of the war than from an attraction to what they saw as the spirituality of that art.”⁶⁰ For Beckmann, as for his Expressionist peers, Gothic art offered a return to the spiritual, transcendental, mystical, and religious aspects of life that were

experienced as being lost in the Modern era.

But at the same time as Beckmann invoked a more timeless form of spirituality, he was also interested in the social conditions of a declining Church and the bruised German nationalism emerging from World War I. Christ’s face is very primitive and almost ape like, conveyed by his prominent cheekbones, sunken in cheeks, upturned nose and slightly-opened mouth. He certainly does not look divine nor does he even look human. The displacement of the cross as a central focus in the painting reflects the declining influence of the Church in society, even as the painting maintains a high spiritual pitch.

CONCLUSION -

Beckmann would later extend his artistic critique of modernity with images of postwar civil unrest in the *Hell* portfolio of 1918-1919 [*Figure 10*]⁶¹. Commissioned by art dealer Israel Ber Neumann, these lithographs served as a response to the revolutionary events between 1918 and 1919 in Germany.⁶² They reflect Beckmann’s wartime experiences and his

58 Beckmann and Buenger, “Catalogue Forward for Exhibition at I.B. Neumann Graphisches Kabinett, Berlin, *Max Beckmann Graphik*,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 179.

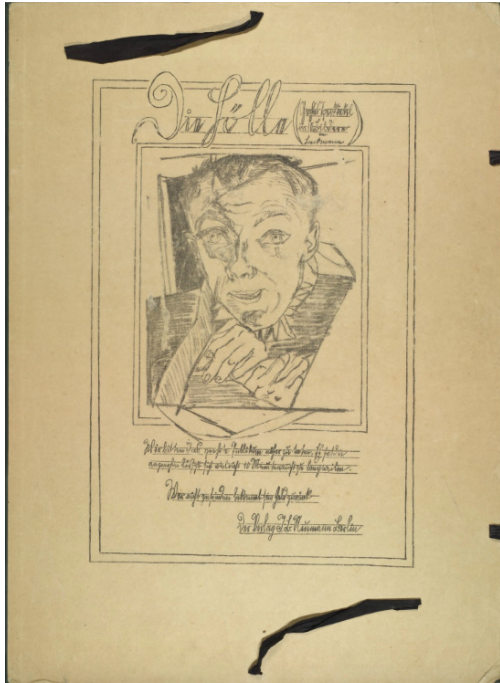
59 Selz, *German Expression Painting*, 18.

60 Beckmann and Buenger, “Catalogue Forward for Exhibition at I.B. Neumann Graphisches Kabinett, Berlin, *Max Beckmann Graphik*,” In *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words*, 179.

61 Max Beckmann. *Hell (Die Hölle)*. 1918-1919. Portfolio of eleven transfer lithographs (including front cover), dimensions vary; sheet (each approx., orientation varies): 24 3/16 x 34 5/16” (61.4 x 87.2 cm) or 34 3/8 x 24 1/8” (87.3 x 61.2 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

62 Barbara C. Buenger, “Max Beckmann’s Ideologues: Some Forgotten Faces,” *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (September 1, 1989), 469-72.

displeasure with Germany's political direction. Moreover, they display Beckmann's shift from a preoccupation with religious themes prior to the *Hell* portfolio to a greater interest in political topics.



Through Beckmann's artistic choices, the *Descent from the Cross* (1917) can be viewed as a political image; however, Beckmann's *Hell* Portfolio (1918-1919) is explicitly political as he aimed to portray socioeconomic issues and political events, such as the murder of anti-war activist and revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg.⁶³ The ten lithographs depict various scenes of social degradation and civil violence as German society was becoming a living hell.

Descent from the Cross (1917) offers direct commentary on German life in the modern era and took an anti-nationalist stance even as it aspired to a

timeless, if pessimistic, spiritual sincerity. Beckmann's *Descent from the Cross* is supposed to be seen not as aesthetically pleasing, but as a specific expression of its period. With the increasing and widespread disenchantment with the war effort in its latter years, Beckmann's post-1916 work can be seen as his way of documenting the social situation of Germany, while highlighting social issues at the time. Beckmann's reaction to fervent German nationalism and an increasingly materialistic national outlook manifested in his focus on secularizing religious iconography and themes as a means of taking an anti-nationalistic stance and critiquing German society. In depicting a grotesque image of the bodily suffering of Christ—who died to save humanity from its sins, Beckmann offers a universal symbol of the larger suffering around him. Beckmann neither conveys nor promises hope through his art; rather he depicts human reality in all of “its banality, its dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare-heroism.”⁶⁴

63 Spieler, *Max Beckmann 1884-1950*, 44.

64 Max Beckmann and Barbara Copeland Buenger, “Creative Credo,” in *Max Beckmann: Self-portrait in Words: Collected Writings and Statements, 1903-1950*, ed. Barbara Copeland Buenger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 184.

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Letter from Duke University's History Department Chair

BY JOHN JEFFRIES MARTIN, DUKE UNIVERSITY

A LIFE IN HISTORY -

What ignites a fascination with history?

One possible avenue – one I greatly respect – is the discovery that history can teach us much about the present. In my own case, however, I was drawn to the subject because it opened up the possibility of understanding a world radically different from our own.

But *caveat discipulus*. Students fascinated by the study of the past run the risk of never letting such studies go!

This was my fate. It happened unexpectedly. In college I planned to be a biology major. Then at the start of my junior year, I was drawn to a course with the curious title: “The Problem of the Names of God.” In this class Caroline Walker Bynum, then one of Harvard’s most dynamic young professors, invited us into a thought world entirely different from our own. We read, analyzed, and debated the ways in which Aquinas, Occam, and other medieval theologians confronted the limits of human language. I found myself staying up late at night, desperately trying to understand these thinkers and what made them tick. I was infected with a desire to understand religious beliefs *historically*.

The next thing I knew I was in graduate school! My parents were mildly horrified, but I entered at a propitious moment. The New Social History was in the ascendant. My fellow grad students were turning to Marx and the *Annales* School to decipher the making of modern politics. I would do the same for early modern religion. In my second year David Herlihy, one of my professors, lent me a copy of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s bestselling *Montaillou*, a retrospective “anthropology” of the heresies and social conflicts in a village in the south of France in the fourteenth century. And the following year, on the recommendation of a friend, I read with equal fascination Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms*, the story of the heresies of a miller in sixteenth-century Italy. These two books made it clear to me that it would be possible – through the study of trial transcripts from the Inquisition – to recover the thought worlds, the outlooks, the hopes

and expectations of men and women who lived long ago. When I discovered that the Inquisition archives in Venice were accessible to scholars, I booked a flight to Europe. This journey led to my dissertation and my first book. Ever since I have been trying to understand the thought worlds not only of early modern humanists and theologians but also of ordinary men and women.

This passion continues down to the present, though my questions have evolved. Just before coming to Duke I spent several years trying to decipher what early modern men and women understood about the self. How, I wondered, did they make sense of personal identity before the rise of individualist ideologies? And I addressed this topic in a book I called *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*. Now – and this was quite unplanned – I am writing a book on the ways in which early modern men and women made sense of history and time itself. Today we carry out our lives under the aegis of the Idea of Progress. We believe that, through our actions, we can make the world a better place. In the sixteenth century, by contrast, men and women longed for the End of History. God had created the world and God would bring about the consummation of History. This dream was both terrifying and filled with hope. To be sure, contemporaries dreaded the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – pestilence, famine, war, and death – but they also believed that, for the Redeemed and the Chosen, there was a promise of eternal peace and justice. Such beliefs were consequential. They played a decisive role not only Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, for example, but also in shaping overseas “discoveries,” in the forging of empire, and even in the making of the new science. Such beliefs even inspired popular uprisings and fantasies of peasant utopias. The apocalyptic, my book argues, was at the core of the making of modernity.

So, for me, a class I took long ago has had the extraordinary affect in shaping my life. I shall always be grateful to Caroline Bynum for her inspirations; to David Herlihy for sharing his copy of *Montaillou*; and to Carlo Ginzburg, with whom I had the good fortune of taking a class when I was an assistant professor.

Ginzburg too was a mesmerizing teacher. In a cramped room in the Newberry Library in Chicago, where our class met, he had us puzzle over archival documents from sixteenth-century Bologna that described, from multiple angles, a popular revolt that broke out during a papal interregnum. Each of these scholar-teachers, in short, took the time not only to ask difficult questions but also to listen to what their students made of the materials we were asked to read and ponder.

We all live within history. When we discover this, it is hard to let go of historical thinking or the historical imagination. For this reason, I remain confident that students will continue to find the study of history compelling. Who knows? A decade from now history may be one of the most popular majors not only at Duke but also at colleges and universities everywhere.

John Jeffries Martin

May 9, 2019

*John Jeffries Martin is the Chair of the Department of History at Duke University. A renowned faculty member and historian of Early Modern Europe, Professor Martin teaches courses in Italian Renaissance and European history. Professor Martin is a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and has received awards from the Renaissance Society of America, National Endowment of the Humanities, American Philosophical Association, Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, and American Historical Association. Both the editorial board of *Historia Nova* as well as Duke's Department of History are exceptionally grateful for Professor Martin's inspirational scholarship and eagerly await his next publication.*

