



Michael Iofin: *The Artist's Parents*, 1983-84. Watercolor and tempera on paper, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Private collection © 2021 Estate of Michael Iofin

Introduction:

Identity, Migration, and Art in and beyond the Nazi Period

Ori Z. Soltes

I. Human Self and Identity

Humans are a complex amalgam of physiological and non-physiological components. Each of us inherits an array of features embedded in DNA sequences that span countless generations and cross-fertilized combinations of chromosomal details. A given pair of siblings—even twins—carrying within them the same elements of DNA yielded by the same set of parents with their own sets of parents and grandparents and ancestors may offer different phenotypical qualities. One has green eyes and the other brown; one has curly dark hair and the other straight, light-colored hair; one grows to 6 feet 2 inches and the other to 5 feet 9 inches. Beyond the apparent physical similarities and differences are the invisible internal ones: the psychological, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional ones: one sibling is consistently calm and the other easily riled up; one is an easy conversationalist and the other laconic; one is fearful of new places and faces and the other an eager seeker of new social territory.

The formation of personality and identity already offers interesting complications if one limits the analysis to genetic makeup, but no individual's identity or personality is fully formed by the limitations of genetics. The environment in which each of us grows up adds further layers to what we become: from the home and the community in which we dwell to the schools that we attend (or our lack of schooling). We are affected and informed, both physically and psycho-spiritually, by the interactions between our parents that we observe and absorb, consciously or unconsciously, and by the genders of our parents, if there are two of them, or the gender of our parent, if there is only one of them.

Moreover, we are physically formed, aside from our DNA, by the foods that we consume from infancy (beginning, no doubt, with whether we are breast-fed), by the degree of encouragement or discouragement we receive to read or to run. Our psyches are affected by our birth order in the family—the first or the second or the third; the middle or the last among a panoply of siblings—or by being a single child, without siblings at all. Our gender and the genders of our siblings, if we have them, can influence who we become. In some cases, as recent medical and psychological realizations have made apparent, there are those among us who are physiologically one gender but early on become aware of being the opposite gender, psychologically and otherwise.

Among the contexts that shape who we become, beyond the elusive complexities of genetics, family, and community that interweave nurture with nature, are major aspects of how we negotiate the world: it is not only that more than 6,000 different languages (and a much larger number of dialects) currently resonate from humanity, but that each language both imposes and reflects cultural, social, and even political norms. Every language interweaves its phonemic and phonetic elements with its peculiarities of syntax and its own semantic shades and nuances. To what extent are we defined by the language—or languages—that we grow up speaking?

For instance, the phoneme that we render with letter *r* is rolled in the back of the roof of the mouth and toward the upper throat in French, rolled toward the front of the mouth with the tongue in Spanish and not rolled at all in virtually every American English dialect's pronunciation. Mandarin has no *r* at all—so that a Mandarin speaker is likely to pronounce an *r* as an *l*. These are a few of many examples of phonemic difference among diverse languages. Do these affect identity—and how is identity affected by having to switch one's everyday language?

This proves to be not only to be a matter of phonemic variation, but-(to repeat) of often significant semantic differences: The Tierra del Fuegan language, spoken until about fifty years ago by the indigenous population of the southernmost tip of South America, lacked all but a few verb forms; Inuit and other so-called Eskimo languages offer a rich vocabulary of terms for different kinds of snow and ice and Arabic does the same for sand. The ancient Greeks have left us a rich legacy of philosophical terminology. The Romans added little to that vocabulary, but they shaped much of the legal and religious terminology that we have also inherited—including the words *law* from *lex*, and *religion* from *religio*.

Language and culture are closely connected to each other, and it stands to reason that the language and culture in which an individual is born and grows up will have an impact on that individual's sense of self: his or her identity.

In some communities, ethnicity—bloodline—as a marker of identity may be connected to a specific religious tradition. To be Russian has typically meant for the past few centuries not only to be ethnically Russian but to be of Russian Orthodox faith—a feature that may have theoretically gone into occultation during the seventy years of twentieth-century Soviet history, but it re-emerged quickly and very strongly by the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. For centuries, to be German has meant to be Lutheran or Roman Catholic. To be Greek has meant to be Greek Orthodox. This sort of national self-definition has offered identity complications with the presence of minorities—occasionally a different Christian denomination, more frequently a small but critical mass of Jews, for example—who may have resided for many centuries in a given polity and yet, virtually up to the present moment, are not somehow considered Russian, German, or Greek—or French or English; one may choose from myriad examples of this reality.

In the past 250 years or so, moreover, as the modern nation-state has not only taken form but has been shaped in a number of different ways—as democratic republics, socialist or communist polities, fascist or monarchic dictatorships—language and culture have been articulated through instruments that may or may not be primarily informed by ethnic or religious elements. This can often be complicated. As relatively simple as situations such as those in Russia, Germany, or Greece appear to be, the United States—a secular state with, however, a National Cathedral, in which the bishop is always an Episcopal bishop—is fraught with complications and paradox. To be American has in theory meant *not* to be defined by one's religion—except that, from the time political participation was left in the hands of the original thirteen colonies and some of them made being a “Christian” a criterion for voting (so that in New Hampshire, for instance, Jews could not vote until 1877), until the present day, when certain groups of Evangelical Protestants have successfully supported political candidates who seem to connect to their religious concerns, religion has often been tightly interwoven with the politics of the American secular democratic state.

The previous paragraphs offer a handful from a much larger array of available angles from which to understand human personality and identity. To this series must be added the question of how or how much of one's identity can be maintained if forced to move from home, particularly as part of a group that has been forcibly diasporic. That question obviously applies in different but related ways to Jews across history—and to Africans within the past 400 years, to Cherokee and other First Nation Americans in and beyond 1836, to Armenians during and after World War I, and to Palestinians after 1947, among other, less obvious groups—and has its own complicated nuances, aside from the psychological makeup of the individuals about whom the question is being asked. The ability to hold onto or to comfortably shift one's identity may well be affected by how old one was when the transition from the home culture or country was made. It may be affected by whether the change is made alone or as part of a family—or as part of a community at large, making it feasible to preserve a range of cultural and linguistic elements from the place of origin within the new location.

The change may be easier or more difficult depending upon how hospitable the inhabitants of the new home are; by one's economic condition before leaving home and after arriving to the new home; or by the circumstances that prompted the relocation in the first case. There are those who leave their home community and country because they are forced to emigrate in order to survive; there are those who choose to do so because they anticipate better opportunities—or typically when coming to the United States, more freedom—than was feasible in the old country.

II. From Sea to Shining Sea: Immigration, Transformation, and American Expansion

Jews coming to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century from central Europe (largely Prussia and Austro-Hungary) were most often young, single men seeking opportunities that were not available to them in Europe as Jews; those coming after about 1881 from Eastern Europe were most often fleeing pogroms and coming as families (albeit often with the father coming alone first, and working to acquire the financial resources to bring the rest of the family soon thereafter). Jews coming from most of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s were usually either desperate to escape the murderous, anti-Semitic programs of the Nazis and their allies or, after the war, coming as refugees whose lives, families, and communities had been decimated or altogether destroyed by the Nazis.

All the variants among these times and conditions were somewhat different from those of other groups who were also seeking new lives in the New World during these same periods. For non-Jewish Slavs or Italians or Germans or Spaniards were rarely leaving—fleeing—because of religious oppression; what they left behind tended to be socioeconomic or political oppression. Jews, although coming from the same places, were often fleeing socioeconomic oppression that was interwoven with and perhaps shaped by religious oppression: by anti-Semitism. Radically different from these and other groups were the Africans who were forced to immigrate to America on slave ships that brought them as a commodity to be bought and sold upon arrival, and who were treated like cattle in the marketplace.

This last issue raises the related question of how the adopted home of America—or for our purposes, more specifically, the United States of America—*received* all of these new arrivals. If the African influx endured the fate of cattle upon arrival and thereafter, those others who arrived of their own volition would be received variously depending upon their place of origin, their culture, language and religion, and the time period during which they arrived.

The United States is, by definition, a nation of immigrants. Indeed, immigration shaped what became the United States not only for nearly three centuries before independence, but for more than 10,000 years: the First Americans arrived in the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods. Many millennia later, in the first few generations after the 1776–1783 period that led to independence, the population of the newly formed polity continued to expand by the tens of thousands through the influx of individuals and groups coming largely from Western Europe to seek new opportunities, and in some cases fleeing some form of religious persecution or oppression. So, too, the population of those forced to these shores as slaves

expanded enormously, fueled mainly by feeding the engine of the rural economy across the southern states.

The physical size of the new republic more than doubled, beginning with the enormous Louisiana Purchase negotiated by Thomas Jefferson with France in 1803, and further expanding thanks to the religion-based idea of Manifest Destiny that prevailed in many circles between the War of 1812 and the acquisition of Alaska by treaty with Russia in 1867. This idea asserted that it was God's will that Euro-Americans (most specifically, Anglo-Saxon Protestants), with their exceptional ideas and institutions, should expand their domination of the continent all the way to the Pacific Ocean. And the discovery of Gold in California led to an exponential upsurge in internal migration to the West Coast region in 1849.

What may be viewed as the first articulation of the idea of American exceptionalism, nearly 150 years before there was a United States, derived from (secular) America's Puritan heritage: the famous 1630 "City on a Hill" sermon of John Winthrop calling for the establishment of a virtuous community that would provide a shining example to the Old World. This sentiment was echoed in Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet promoting the Revolution, in which he wrote: "We have it within our power to begin the world over again. Such a situation . . . has not happened since the days of Noah." This noble idea eventually begat an often self-centered and even delusional policy of responsibility and privilege which resonates to this day with the MAGA¹ fans of Donald Trump.

It should be noted, however, that not all Americans nor all the American political leadership embraced Manifest Destiny in those early days. The Whig party leadership worried that the republic was spreading out too quickly. More specifically, in July 1848, Alexander Stephens (who would later be vice president of the Confederate states, in 1861–1865), denounced President Polk's expansionist interpretation of the American future as "mendacious." Ulysses S. Grant, who early in his career served in the war that would wrest Texas from Mexico (1846–1848), later wrote that he had "bitterly opposed the measure [to annex Texas], and to this day regard[s] the war which resulted as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."²

So one can perceive a tension within the evolving United States regarding this issue, and as the country expanded, "extending the area of freedom" for southerners—with no sense of irony whatsoever—this meant extending the area in which slavery presided, helping to make that issue an increasingly central one in the decades leading to the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln, presiding over the country as its president during that unique manifestation of the ongoing American wrestling match with its soul and with its identity, had earlier opposed both what he saw as the unjust and illogical imperialism of Manifest Destiny and the anti-immigrant nativism that went hand-in-hand with it, most notably in his June 6, 1852, "Eulogy to Henry Clay."

Two related, increasingly large issues emerged within this expansionist context that necessarily expanded the immigrant profile of the United States in order for there to be a large enough population to fulfill such a divinely imposed destiny upon the Republic of the Free. One, which was a cognate to the increasing division of sentiment regarding the principle of Manifest Destiny, pertained to the emerging pushback against immigrants by those whose own families had rarely been here for more than a few generations. Thus what, without irony, called itself

the Nativist Movement emerged, particularly as the numbers of immigrants swelled dramatically in the period flanking the Civil War (ca. 1830–1875).

Two: Both the underlying theory for Manifest Destiny and its actual playing out had an obviously deleterious outcome for the First Nations population—from the Iroquois to the Cherokee to the Cheyenne to the Sioux to the Navajo to the Yana. That population was treated as if it did not exist, or at least as if its presence gave it no right to obstruct the Euro-American expansion into the continental interior and across its vast midlands toward the western coast. Treaties arrived at to share the lands now sought by Whites with the indigenous population were repeatedly made—and broken—by the federal government. Indigenous populations were frequently removed from their millennia-old habitats or confined to set-aside corners of those properties—“reservations”—or *both* removed *and* confined. Most famous of these experiments in activated White Supremacy was the mass transfer of the Cherokee from the rich-soiled hills of Georgia to a dusty area within Oklahoma, in order to free up the southeast (in which area, moreover, gold was rumored to have been discovered) for Whites, in 1836. Mandated by President Andrew Jackson, what has become known as the Trail of Tears created a hopeless journey in which large numbers of Cherokee were force-marched west under the eye of American troops and in which many perished before even getting to the Unpromised Land.

Native Americans would in fact not be allowed to apply for citizenship, much less be embraced as citizens of the American polity until 1924.³ They were, one might say, the ultimate strangers in their own land—which was no longer their land—for nearly thirteen decades after the time of the American Declaration of Independence from England. In fact, the Constitution that followed on the heels of that Declaration offered two interesting compromises so that all thirteen colonies would agree to be part of the new republic. The southern states continued to base their economies on slavery, and slaves—as the non-human property of their White owners—had virtually no civil or political rights. Yet in order to speak with a louder voice within the new federal government—for which the leadership would be elected not only by the raw count of votes cast by its eligible-to-vote citizens (adult White males), but by an Electoral College, the numbers of which were keyed to the population numbers of the individual states—it was agreed that each African American adult male would count as 3/5 of a person, so that Black-heavy states, while continuing to allow no rights to their Black populations, could benefit from those numbers in the Electoral College tallies.

It was, moreover, to repeat, left to the individual states to determine whether or not religion would be a criterion for participation in the political system. In Maryland, it was decided that being a Christian would be a necessary qualification: Jews did not receive the right to vote until 1826—and in New Hampshire, Jews (to repeat) could not vote until 1877. Then, too, no woman, White or Black, was given the right to vote. Long after constitutional amendments provided that right to Black males and all of the individual states had lined up behind the notion of providing it to non-Christians, women were expected to limit their role in the shaping of the United States to domestic aspects of American culture: the Nineteenth Amendment would provide them with voting rights only after World War I, in 1920.

Of course, by the beginning of the 1860s a different sort of double crisis from that embedded within the doctrine of Manifest Destiny emerged. It pertained both to the optimal

relationship between the authority of individual states and that of the federal government, and to the issue of slavery as the engine driving the rural economies of the southern states. The Civil War (in part, as noted above, a collateral consequence of Manifest Destiny thinking) crystallized many of the divisions within the American polity—barely eight decades old at that point—and highlighted diverse ways in which Americans feel and express the identity of being American. The wounds of these divisions outlived the war, were reinforced by the era of Reconstruction that followed the war and rearticulated by the Jim Crow laws that managed to offer an ongoing semi-enslaved—or at least radically disenfranchised—condition for the African Americans who were nominally liberated by the outcome of the Civil War. An array of divisions—pertaining to the sense of Americanism, with regard to culture, ethnicity, race, religion, and political perspective—in some respects were never healed, emerged with a renewed vehemence in the era of Donald Trump’s presidency.

All these issues, but particularly the issue of embracing or rejecting immigrants who hoped to become new Americans, expanded significantly between about 1880 and the aftermath of World War I. If America was torn between those with nativist sensibilities and those who championed our national identity as a nation of immigrants—albeit, as a “melting pot,” according to which our national ethos demanded that immigrants abandon their old identities unequivocally in order to assume a viable American identity—there were new channels for these conflicting perspectives: immigrants from southern and eastern, rather than northern, western and central Europe, and, particularly as the West Coast so quickly became part of the Union, diverse immigrant groups from Asia.

With changes in the sourcing for new immigrants, variants in the nativist perspective began to surface, with the intention of controlling what *kinds* of immigrants, in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and presumably, political inclinations, would even be permitted to melt into the pot. On the one hand, the upsurge in immigrants from Asia led to a legislative series, including the Chinese Exclusion Act (CEA), signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur in May 1882. That Act prohibited immigration into the US by Chinese laborers. It was preceded by anti-Chinese violence, as well as less comprehensive legal moves, such as the US-China Burlingame Treaty of 1868 that allowed the US to suspend Chinese immigration at any time; the Page Act of 1875, which banned Chinese women from immigration; and the Angell Treaty of 1880, which offered some revisions to the Burlingame Treaty. The CEA was intended to run for ten years, but it was instead renewed and made more stringent in 1892 with the Geary Act, and made permanent in 1902.

The CEA remains the only law to have been enacted in the United States to prevent all members of a specific ethnic or national group from immigrating to these shores. There were certain permitted exceptions for diplomats, teachers, students, and businessmen, and it was often successfully evaded in any case. On the other hand, as a practical matter it affected would-be visitors and immigrants from non-Chinese East Asian countries, thanks to a functional inability for American officials to distinguish one East Asian group from another. The exclusionary legislation was repealed in the middle of World War II, on December 17, 1943, by the Magnuson Act, because at that point China was our ally against Japan. But even then, only 105 Chinese were allowed into the country annually. There were further adjustments, allowing

for an increase in immigration with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952; the updated version of that Act in 1965 all but abolished exclusions based on national origins.

Where the matter of Europeans was concerned, an evolving quota system intended to limit would-be immigrants to the United States from Eastern and Southern European countries was shaped and reshaped by the 1890s, culminating with the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which all but shut the door on inhabitants of those parts of Europe. The quota system had an inordinately large effect on Jews, given the enormous number of them who had managed to enter between 1881 and 1924, and the number still eager to come to America. Frequent massacres culminated with the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, followed by a subsequent, less extensive pogrom in Kishinev in 1905 that was part of a sweep of 600 pogroms across the Tsarist realms. If pogroms and the Blood-Libel-based trial of Mendel Beiliss in Kiev in 1911–1913 underscored the unique, life-threatening dangers to which Jews in Eastern Europe were subject, then the trial and eventual lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia in 1913–1915, following the murder of Mary Phagan on the chronological cusp of the Beiliss affair, made it tragically clear that anti-Semitism had found a warm home in many parts of the United States.

As, in retrospect, the world that emerged out of the Great War moved inevitably toward World War II—for various social, economic, and political reasons the details of which fall outside this brief discussion—paradoxes remained paramount in the ongoing evolution of the United States and the American dream. Other parts of the world were moving toward domination by autocrats of varied theoretical and political stripes: Benito Mussolini as a fascist—the very term was his, adapting the symbol (the *fasces*) of the ancient Roman *Republic* to assert his singular power over his hoped-for Italian *empire*; Francisco Franco as a fascist; Michinomiya Hirohito as a divine being; Joseph Stalin as a communist; and above all, Adolf Hitler as a “socialist,” the leader of the National Socialist Party in Germany. The United States preferred to stay out of involvement in any of that: the League of Nations had been proposed by American President Woodrow Wilson,⁴ in order to create a mechanism to prevent further worldwide wars, yet it did not have the United States among its members. Our own Congress, political and social leaders, and population saw no purpose in being engaged with the Old World in such an enterprise.

Meanwhile the 1920s roared in America. Epic entertainment evolved from sea to shining sea with the burgeoning of Hollywood on the West Coast and with the New York Yankees on the East Coast. In 1927 Babe Ruth electrified the American populace with his gargantuan feat of sixty home runs in the course of one season in what had become known as the “national pastime.” In that same year, Charles Lindbergh wowed the entire planet—and offered himself as a symbol of the American capability to meet difficult challenges—by flying the *Spirit of St. Louis* on his own across the Atlantic Ocean. The city that embraced him on the European side of his adventure, Paris, was by that time the home to a number of American Blacks prominent in the arts, because the French, for whatever their long history of anti-Semitism and colonial disregard for Asians and Africans, were far more hospitable than America to individuals of color.

As for Charles Lindbergh himself: as Hitler rose to prominence and then to complete political domination of Germany, finally bringing war again to the continent of Europe, the

great American aviator-hero became rather outspoken as a fan of the Führer. Nonetheless, as with World War I, so with World War II: the United States backed into the conflict. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, left us with no choice. If we led the subsequent struggle against a trio of dictators, our own alliance included the fourth dictator. And if on the one hand we can be cheered for having been in the vanguard of securing political freedom for much of Europe in the course of the three and a half years that followed Pearl Harbor, there were other aspects of our actions—and nonactions—during that time period that raise questions and should not be ignored.

Thus, we ended the Chinese Exclusion Act because China was considered an ally against Hirohito, but on the other hand we quickly evolved a system throughout much of the American Southwest in which we incarcerated tens of thousands of Japanese Americans—citizens, many of them three or four generations into their presence in America, not visitors or only recent immigrants—in special camps. This was not a policy that we enacted toward German Americans or Italian Americans—Europeans and those of European descent—suggesting rather distinctly that the American view not only of incoming immigrants but even of citizens who have inhabited the country for several generations was not an even-handed view.

We might ask, too, given the discussion of the previous paragraphs, how active and eager the United States was to stop the Holocaust of Jews (and others less systematically decimated by the Nazis, such as the Roma) in the course of the three and a half years of our war against the Germans and their Axis allies. Were we as eager to stop the Nazis in their genocidal activities as we were to stop the Germans in their world-conquering ambitions? We might further ask—given the nativist, anti-immigrant side of the American ethos that had culminated in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924—how hospitable we were willing to be to Jews and others desperate to come to these shores while Hitler was assuming power as Chancellor in 1933 and dismantling the German democracy known as the Weimar Republic with great alacrity over the next few years.

By 1935, laws passed at Nuremberg began a process of eliminating citizenship rights for Jews in Germany. Within a matter of another few years that eliminationist program was transformed with ever-increasing precision and systematic passion into a plan simply for eliminating Jews. Within those same few years, as Hitler's Germany started to swallow up its neighbors, even before war formally broke out in 1939, the places where Jews could find refuge within Europe were shrinking; the possibilities for somehow waiting out the difficulties were diminishing. Would the light held up in New York harbor by the majestic figure of Lady Liberty—with a poem at her feet written in 1883 by an immigrant, a Jewish poet by the name of Emma Lazarus, proclaiming that the "lamp beside the golden door" was upheld for "the tired, the wretched refuse, yearning to be free"—shine, or would it be quenched?

If, say, a proposal were to be put before Congress and the American people to bring in some thousands of refugee children beyond the 1924 quota numbers (the proposed 1939 Wagner-Rogers Bill was just that), how would we—how did we—respond? Suppose the captain of a ship carrying nearly a thousand Jewish refugees who had paid for visas to Cuba was informed that their visas were suddenly deemed expired—a ship, somewhat ironically, bearing the same name as the American city (named for the same French king) that graced Charles

Lindbergh's plane. What if the captain asked for refuge in one of the many harbors along the American (and Canadian) eastern coastline? Would we take its passengers in?

What of the aftermath of the war? How did things change or not change in a context in which the United States had become a unique power within the wide world? The world, however, had itself changed in many ways, one of which was that, by the late 1940s, that fourth dictator who had been our ally against the other three, Josef Stalin, the brutal leader of the Soviet Union credited with murdering tens of millions of Soviet citizens, had now become our enemy. The hottest of wars had ended but a cold war had begun. How might—how did—such a change affect our relationship to immigrants?

How do all the questions raised in the previous paragraphs apply to the immigrants themselves? That is, if part of the question is how hospitable we have been in the particularized circumstances of World War II and the Holocaust—thinking back to the questions of identity with which this essay began—how have and do immigrants who manage to arrive on our shores adjust to and establish themselves in the United States, with its language, its culture, its politics, and its ambiguities and paradoxes? How do the sources of identity make it easy or difficult for individuals who migrate from one location to another—by choice or under duress—not merely to adapt but to become fully comfortable within their new home? Needless to say, the condition of arriving here as a nineteenth-century immigrant is similar to but by no means identical to the condition of arriving here as a refugee—particularly a Jewish refugee—from Nazi Germany in the 1930s or 1940s.

How are the questions of identity affected differently by the conditions of immigration between 1881 and 1924—even when those conditions included the pogroms that most Jewish immigrants from Tsarist Russia escaped by coming to America—from the conditions of fleeing Nazi Germany or Nazi-occupied Europe?

We might expect the issues of identity formation and transformation to be especially acute in the case of artists, whose sensitivities may be particularly fine-tuned, who translate the reality around them into visual form. How, with their particular set of sensibilities—as purveyors of, respondents to, and shapers of culture—do artists respond to their own migration? How do they transfer the diverse identity norms of the worlds they leave behind to the new worlds into which they arrive? Can they translate from one language of images to another? For, as much as this question must be asked of practitioners in different media, such as music and poetry or prose writing, for the purposes of this narrative we are focused on visual art and its creators.

The question of identity and its expression thus becomes doubled: we are not only talking about the psychological and spiritual comfort or discomfort felt by the artist, but about the works of art that he or she produces and how they are informed by new circumstances and the artist's responses to a New World.

III. Jewish Immigrants: Weaving the Self into the Tapestry of America

God bless America, Land that I love!

*Stand beside her and guide her,
through the night with the light from above . . .*

These opening words from a hymn—almost a prayer—were written in 1918 by a Jewish immigrant named Israel Beilin (1888–1989), who was serving in the American army shortly after the US entered World War I in 1917.⁵ Beilin had arrived from Russia in 1893. By the time he wrote this song—one of some 1500 that he penned in the course of his career—he had anglicized his name to Irving Berlin, and clearly stepped out of the Russian- and Yiddish-language reality with which he had arrived as a five-year-old and into an intimate and comfortable relationship with the English language and American culture. (Among his most iconic compositions was “White Christmas”—the quintessential symbol of the Americanization of that central Christian holiday).

His love affair with America as the country that allowed his success is signified, in part, by the fact that all of the royalties from “God Bless America” were assigned to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America. His songs form a substantial part of the Great American Songbook; as early as 1924, composer Jerome Kern wrote (in a letter to the writer, Alexander Woollcott), that “Irving Berlin has no *place* in American music—he *is* American music.”⁶ In the 1930s, composer George Gershwin commented that Berlin “was the very first to have created a real, inherent American music,” and at his hundredth birthday celebration at Carnegie Hall, no less a figure than television newsman Walter Cronkite observed that Berlin’s songs “helped write the story of this country, capturing the best of who we are and the dreams that shape our lives.”⁷

Immigrant Jews have a particularly intense history of weaving themselves into the American tapestry. This can be seen from the time of the American struggle for independence against the British—as in the famously extensive financial assistance given to George Washington’s troops by Polish-born Haym Solomon—to the present day. There are particularly important instances of success that reverberate from this desire that grow out of the exponential expansion of the Jewish population thanks to the nearly 2.5 million arrivals during the 1881–1924 era, mainly from Eastern Europe. One might observe this in particular in two apparently antithetical kinds of involvement in the American scene: sports and the arts. In the first case (which, perhaps counterintuitively, is relevant to this art-focused narrative because of the context that it provides), two sports in particular stand out and, for the purposes of this narrative, two individuals may serve as symbols of the Jewish immigrant commitment to—and success in—integration within America.

The sport to which a disproportionate number of Jewish immigrant athletes were initially drawn was boxing. Both the conditions of the various urban ghettos in which so many began their residence in America and perhaps the legacy of Daniel “Battling” Mendoza—who had held the heavyweight title in England in 1791–1795 and invented the “scientific” style of boxing—yielded that athletic direction for Jews as surely as it did for Irish, Italian, and other immigrants.

Among these who were part of an unparalleled Jewish prominence among American boxing ranks in the 1920s and 1930s, was Chicago-based Barney Ross (1909–1967). Ross came to be seen by American Jews as a key instrument in the struggle against anti-Semitism. He was

the ultimate Jew who did not back down but fought back. His ideology echoed that of “muscular Judaism,” articulated in Europe in the early part of the century.⁸

Ross embraced this role. When he fought Jimmy McLarnin for the welterweight title for the first time in New York in May 1934, pro-Nazi rallies were taking place in the city at virtually the same time. Conscious of Hitler’s rise, Ross said that he felt like he was fighting for the entire Jewish people.

If boxing could offer an obvious path out of the ghetto into the American mainstream, the ultimate road was paved with baseball. Barney Ross’s contemporary who fought with a giant swing, carrying American Jews on his broad shoulders, was “Hammerin’ Hank” Greenberg (1911–1986), the first Jewish baseball superstar. For this discussion, Greenberg’s various MVP accomplishments⁹ with the Detroit Tigers *on* the playing field are less important than his iconic decision to take himself *off* that field on a single day in 1934. As virtually any baseball fan (and then some) knows, Greenberg chose not to play on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), although the holiday fell during the intense autumn stretch in which the Detroit Tigers were neck-in-neck with the New York Yankees in the race for the American League pennant—Detroit’s first chance to win it since 1909.

Moreover, this was at a time not only when Hitler was in power and increasingly strangling Germany’s Jews, but when the Führer had an American acolyte in Henry Ford, in the city in which Greenberg starred. In the mid-1920s, Ford had printed thousands of copies of the insidious, antisemitic tract *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to distribute to his workers. So, too, this period included the ugliness of Father Charles Coughlin, a Detroit-based Catholic priest who aired a popular radio program every Sunday morning in which he typically excoriated Jews in a manner consistent with the Führer’s rhetoric.

Greenberg would later write in his autobiography that “I came to feel that if I, as a Jew, hit a home run, I was hitting one against Hitler.” Within the American Jewish community, Hammerin’ Hank was already a messianic figure, particularly within the Hitler-Ford-Coughlin context, and the ultimate symbol of the possibility to become fully integrated into American culture—for which sports in general and baseball in particular were such an essential element.¹⁰ His decision not to play on *Yom Kippur*, to abide by a more solemn Jewish value rather than a “win at all costs” American value, was a shot heard around the world.

The response of the non-Jewish American world was—with the obvious exception of those who were fans of Father Coughlin—decidedly positive. Detroit poet Edgard Guest immortalized both Greenberg and himself with verses that conclude with the lines

...We shall miss him in the infield and shall miss him at the bat,

But he’s true to his religion—and I honor him for that!”

A further significant note on sports and the American response to Hitler and the Nazis resonates from what happened as the 1936 Olympics rolled around, slated to take place in Berlin. There was a push to boycott the Nazi-sponsored games, but the pushback was stronger, and the head of the American Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage—a genteel anti-Semite such as are found throughout the civilized world—was emphatic about the need for American

participation. More significantly for this narrative: he saw to it that Jewish athletes were removed from the American team, lest Hitler be offended. The most infamous instance of this was the removal of sprinters Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller from the 4 x 100 relay race. The irony is that Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe—both African Americans—were substituted for Glickman and Stoller, and the Americans triumphed, to Hitler's great disgust.¹¹

During the same era in which Jewish athletes like Ross and Greenberg were leaving their mark on American sports, Jewish visual artists in America—immigrants and the children of immigrants—were introducing new styles into the American art scene. With them, we may repeat the questions from a more concrete angle: How do artists, with their particular set of sensibilities, respond to their own migration? How do they transfer the diverse identity norms of the worlds they leave behind to the new worlds into which they arrive? Can they translate from one language of images to another?



Fig. 1 Max Weber: *Rush Hour, New York*, 1915. Oil on canvas, overall: 36 1/4 x 30 1/4 in. (92 x 76.9 cm). National Gallery of Art 1970.6.1. Gift of the Avalon Foundation

The answer is that some cannot and some do—depending upon any number of factors, ranging from the age of the artist when she or he arrives to a new place to the DNA that helps inform the personality that responds differently, in every individual, to identical conditions. For some, the outcome is spectacular. Cubism, as a stylistic direction evolved by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in Paris in 1909–1912, first appeared in America on the canvasses of Russo-Polish-born Max Weber (1881–1961). Weber arrived to New York City at the age of ten¹² and became the first American Cubist painter of note—re-visioning the irregular natural forms of reality as intersecting lines and planes, curves, diagonals, verticals, and horizontals.

His fascination with Einstein's discussions of relativity, recently published at the time,¹³ and an interest in the new art form of cinematography,¹⁴ where a succession of static images

yields the illusion of motion to the viewer's eye, is reflected in a literal manner (through its very title) in his "Interior of the Fourth Dimension" (1913). Weber's image is a stylized cityscape, with the sense of a harbor in the foreground and a boat with its sails moving across the organized cacophony of bridges and buildings that fill out much of the space. The entire "interior" work is suffused with a sense of flickering light—and framed by a dark, negative-space "exterior" that intermediates between the "action" and the canvas edge—so that the effect on the viewer's eye is as if watching a movie.

In "Rush Hour, New York" (1915), the artist's intention is to give the viewer a sense of motion on an immobile, flat surface—and more than that, the particular ongoing and repeated motion of cars, taxis, buses—and even, underground, the whizzing of the overpacked subway trains—associated with rush hour in the growing city. His extremely restrained palette seems to reinforce the cityscape underpinnings of his vision. This idea of translating action onto a static canvas, and of paradoxically, surrounding the eye with a sense of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface, attracted Weber again and again during this decade [Fig 1].

Completely the opposite in style and intention is the art of Lithuanian-born Ben Shahn (1898–1969), whose family arrived to New York in 1906, his father having fled Siberian exile to meet up with them. Shahn's imagery was both figurative—albeit in a somewhat expressionistic manner—and intended as sociopolitical commentary. Shahn's work is regarded as a foundation of Social Realism. In his early thirties, he expressed how he had always "wished that I'd been lucky enough to be alive at a great time—when something big was going on, like the Crucifixion. And suddenly I realized that I was! Here I was living through another crucifixion. Here was something to paint!"¹⁵ The outcome was "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti," of 1931–1932—one image from a more extended series on that subject—with its distorted expressionistic faces and its ironic flowers of innocence.

Those faces belong to the bigoted members of the blue-blood, blue-ribbon Lowell Committee—the presidents of Harvard University (Abbott Lawrence Lowell) and MIT (Samuel Wesley Stratton), and the novelist and retired Probate Judge, Robert Grant. In 1927, they had been called upon by Massachusetts Governor Alvan T. Fuller to review the 1921 court case in which the two Italian American anarchists had been on trial for a murder that many believed they did not commit, but for which they were found guilty. This review was hardly an examination by "a jury of their peers" but rather by scions of a social class fearful of the consequences of allowing anarchist immigrant workers with limited command of the English language to go free.

The review upheld the original conclusion of a trial in which the prevailing judge had exhibited clear prejudice, and Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. In Shahn's painting, Grant and Stratton hold flowers intended to recall the white lily so often placed in the angel Gabriel's hand by Renaissance portrayals of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary of her divine pregnancy. If she is purity—so much so that even pregnant, she remains virginal and the angel signifies this by the flower that he brings her—these black-clad figures are angels of death bearing the symbols of innocence to the pair of innocents whom they have consigned to the grave, albeit without a hint of irony—or of the awareness that lilies also symbolize death and resurrection. The central figure—Lowell—wears a blood-red academic collar, as if to underscore the blood-

guilt of all three of the committee members, and the blood-sacrifice of the two figures in their coffins.¹⁶ The flutes of the columns on what is apparently a courthouse appear almost as bars, as Judge Webster Thayer—justice itself incarnate—is inescapably framed, imprisoned within the grandiose architecture that is his emblem. The miscarriage of justice will experience no relief in this grim, tight little world [Fig 2].

Shahn's social interest took different paths. In his 1939 painting "WPA Sunday," with a calm eye, he observed the jobless and churchless and hopeless, for which the New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs provided hopes and jobs; Shahn himself was a WPA painter during the Great Depression. His "Italian Landscape" of 1943–1944 shows the kind of tragic moment that binds humans together: death. In this case, human-caused (war) death is suggested by a bombed-out, crumbling bridge—or is it an ancient Roman aqueduct, suggesting a transgenerational continuum of human civilization engaged in self-destruction?



Fig. 2 Ben Shahn: *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, 1931-32. Tempera and opaque watercolor on canvas mounted on composition board, 84 × 48 in. (213.4 × 121.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art 49.22. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York / Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY © 2021 Estate of Ben Shahn / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Among the outstanding practitioners of Social Realism are Moses Soyer (1899–1974) and his better-known twin brother, Raphael (1899–1987), both part of a larger array of siblings who, together with their younger brother Isaac (1907–1981), had been raised in a household overrun with culture and engaged in various forms of artistic productivity. All three brothers were born in southern Tsarist Russia, arriving to New York City by way of Philadelphia in 1912. There they all explored the various arts, but finally focused on painting and were ultimately drawn to depict the diverse inhabitants of the world of New York City that swirled around them, engaging its often-disconnected human scene with a particular fervor. Moses and Raphael Soyer dropped out of high school to help support the family, but they attended free evening art classes at Cooper Union and the National Academy of Design. In the 1930s, Raphael came to a poetic, sadness-evoking style that he never left behind, exemplified by the wide, dark, empty-and-droopy-eyed, countenance-shadowed self-portraits and a 1932 painting of “The Artist’s Parents.” The parents stare, not outward, but inward, presented formally as part of an oblique pyramid—that most stable of architectural forms—created by their arms across the horizontal edge of the tabletop, their shoulders and heads suggesting diagonals and reaching the apex via the picture on the sideboard behind them: an indistinct black-and-white photograph of a mother and child. The image has an old-world feel to it—that is, it is an image of the past, so that the interior pyramid is one held together by memory. The formally posed and attired pair remains rooted in that past, other world [Fig 3].



Fig. 3 Raphael Soyer: *The Artist's Parents*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 28 x 30 in. (71.1 x 76.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1979.550. Gift of the artist, 1979 Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Licensed by Art Resource, NY © Estate of Raphael Soyer

Outside the compositional pyramid, the painful and stark elements of the present—particularly the ugly wall socket, which might easily have been left out by the artist, who nonetheless chose to leave it glaringly there—faces us banally, as we, too, stand outside that isolating interior pyramidal structure. Is this the image of a couple who, like many older immigrant couples, cannot quite acclimate themselves to the New World around them? Is their existential aloneness a function of their Judaism or of their foreignness—or both.

Isolation—not existential angst, as much as loneliness—evolves as a recurrent motif in Raphael Soyer’s work. One might ask whether this reflects an immigrant sensibility of never feeling quite at home within the contexts that he depicts; or a Jewish sense of discomfort in a world, old or new, in which one never feels fully embraced; or simply the artist’s particular personality.

These sorts of questions will in any case continually emerge with various smaller waves of immigration, including Jewish immigration to the United States as the century extends forward. There are notable increases in émigrés from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and, in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, from its offspring, the Russian Federation, in the 1990s. (Many more went to Israel, which, not surprisingly, offered a readier policy of welcoming Russo-Soviet Jewish refugees.) In some respects, the encounter with American culture was more intense than it was for the immigrants in the early twentieth century. Consider this simple example: in the USSR, in the food market there might be one or at most two kinds of cheese, and there might not be any left to purchase by the time a shopper got to it; entering an American supermarket the shopper might be confronted by vast supplies of dozens of cheeses from which to choose.

Translating the sort of shock that this might induce for the post-Soviet immigrant into the context of art, one must understand that successive Soviet administrations, from Stalin and his decrees of 1934 onward, insisted that only Soviet Socialist Realist art might be exhibited. So artists functioned in what has been called a “two-world condition”: if they were to survive as artists, they needed to produce Soviet Realist work for public consumption—in which they might embed hidden symbols that the authorities would not discern; and the art that grew out of their souls’ need could be shown only to a very small group of very trustworthy friends and family members. For Soviet Jewish artists, this blossomed into a “three-world condition” in which the third element was the inclusion of symbols reflecting the Jewish side of their identity.¹⁷ In America, anything goes artistically, but there might not be that small but substantive audience of supporters who understand the visual language being spoken by these artists from a different world.

In the 1970s, a handful of Soviet Jewish artists—like Vitaly Komar (b. 1943) and Alexander Melamid, (b. 1945), who had met as schoolmates in art school in Moscow and worked together for decades—managed to find success in the United States. They found their way into the American psyche while maintaining their connection to the sorts of ironic productivity—such as their *Sots Art*, with its play between Soviet Socialist Realism and American Warholian Pop Art—that they had devised while still residing in the USSR. Many more artists disappeared into virtual invisibility within the American art world.

By the last decade of the century, another generation was finding its way to these shores. Michael Iofin (1958–2020) graduated from the State School of Fine Arts, State Institute of Arts and Crafts, and Academy of Fine Arts, and was expelled from the Mukhina Art and Design Institute (in 1983, in his fourth year), for participating in exhibitions of “unofficial art”—before relocating from Leningrad to San Francisco by the early 1990s, fifteen years after Komar and Melamid came to New York. As they had, he left behind a two-world artistic condition—or three—only to find himself caught between worlds, as nearly every immigrant initially is.

Iofin’s moving watercolor and tempera “Portrait of My Parents” (1983–1984) recalls Raphael Soyer’s image of half a century earlier. However, it depicts not an immigrant duo isolated between old and new realities, but a pair isolated within their own homeland that has come to treat them as strangers rather than as family. In tongue-in-cheek, photo-perfect Soviet Socialist Realist style, the artist represents his father and mother dominating a landscape in pure significance perspective. The painting is overrun with details, every one of which offers a symbolic articulation of their condition of estrangement in a strange, familiar land. They huddle as much as embrace. Iofin’s war-hero father, his chest filled with medals, has a watch on his wrist with no numbers or hands, suggesting both the stopping of time and the nonfunctioning of basic instruments in the Soviet world. In a large and powerful hand, he holds a letter from a Lithuanian writer known for his fearless writing about the Holocaust during the Khrushchev years, the early 1960s, when such an unhappy and sympathetic-to-Jews subject was part of a forbidden narrative. By the time of this remembered moment, the writer had immigrated to Israel [Fig 4].



Fig. 4 Michael Iofin: *The Artist's Parents*, 1983-84. Watercolor and tempera on paper, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Private collection © 2021 Estate of Michael Iofin

The freezing winter of 1943 and the blockade that took the lives of so many inhabitants of Leningrad form the left side of the backdrop; the right side offers summertime in the village of Mukhina, the birthplace of the artist's father and where the Nazis massacred so many Jews during the war. Spread out before the couple on a platter is a yellow Star of David from that period, a small cross, and between these items, a green apple—recalling the moment of incipient human disaster spelled out in Genesis—upon which two drops, of water and blood, rest. An old family portrait, a small jewelry box, and the contents of his mother's purse, together with myriad *tchotchkes*, from chess pieces to figurines—the heirlooms of family memory—offer a rich visual panoply that is at once personal, national, and universal: after all, that wristwatch at the virtual center of the compositional foreground reminds us that questions of home and identity are timeless.

Surely Iofin could not have imagined in 1983, recently expelled from art school, that he would be gone from the Soviet Union—which would itself collapse—within a decade, or that, on the heels of his homeland's transformation, he would end up in a new homeland—coming from St. Petersburg (as Leningrad had come to be called again) to San Francisco. Arguably his signature image from the early 1990s and this period of transition is his 1991 acrylic and tempera diptych, "July 4," in which the image is precisely divided between worlds. Under a nearly identical bright blue sky—there are the beginnings of grayish clouds, suggesting the possibility of eventual rain, in the left-hand image—a banner connecting both images waves in the light breeze, with the words "of July" in Latin letters on the right side and "4 июля" in Cyrillic on the left. A Russian flag hangs in the left-side image, an American flag in the right-side image.



Fig. 5 Michael Iofin: *July 4*, 1991. Diptych. Acrylic and tempera on canvas, 14 x 22 in. (35.6 x 55.9 cm). Private collection © 2021 Estate of Michael Iofin

The banner is stretched across telephone wires, above rooftops that may be identified as those of American houses on the right and Russian *dachas* on the left. The first offer immaculately tiled rooves and clear, stucco walls; the latter present gingerbread details, with log walls—and two-by-fours haphazardly thrown up to hold down the roof tar paper due to the missing roof tiles. The artist has managed to bridge the two very different visual and material realities that occupy his mind—with his paintbrush and, as he has in the decades since, with an enthusiastic devouring of the English language and the world of San Francisco [Fig 5].

IV. Jewish Immigrant Artists in the Context of the Holocaust

Sandwiched chronologically between the migrational realities of the early and later parts of the twentieth century is the unique era of refugee migration leading toward, during, and immediately following the Holocaust. The decade or so before World War II and the Holocaust was one in which, to repeat, not only did Nazism begin its stranglehold on Germany, but fascism of diverse sorts sprouted like the ugliest of weeds across much of Europe, from Spain to the Soviet Union. Perhaps the oddest datum in considering the four major European dictatorial regimes is where they fell when war eventually broke out: Mussolini and Italy would end up allied with Hitler and Germany; Stalin and the USSR—after a quasi-alliance between the Soviet Union and Germany that had been abrogated by Hitler—joined the alliance against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) that included England, the part of France that was not overrun by Germany, and eventually the United States. Franco and fascist Spain, of which he had achieved control with the assistance of the German Luftwaffe (most infamously in the destruction of the small town of Guernica in 1937), remained nominally neutral.

Nor, of course, was the situation that simple: the *Anschluss*—the invasion of Austria by Germany in 1938—was received by the Austrians with enthusiasm; their support for Nazism and their cruelty toward their Jewish fellow-citizens exceeded in intensity that exhibited by Germans. Countries like Holland and Poland fought hopelessly against the Germans. Both countries gave up their Jews: a higher percentage of Dutch Jews perished during the Holocaust than in any other European country and Poland became the epicenter of the gradually developing Nazi exterminationist machine. Polish residents of the area around Auschwitz could, with straight faces, comment after the war, that they had mistaken the stench of burning human flesh rising from the crematoria ovens for several years for that of freshly baked bread.

If, as virtually all of Europe—with exceptions, such as Denmark and Bulgaria—became a systematically run abattoir for Jews and a somewhat less-systematically extended killing field for others, an extraordinary range of people, victims, and potential victims of the Nazi regime fled, first from Germany and eventually from the areas that the German armies came to control across most of Europe. Among those who could make America their destination, there were many developing and already well-established visual artists.

To the questions of the degree of receptivity or non-receptivity of America to incoming refugees, artistic and otherwise—and the degree to which incoming refugees (and particularly the artists among them) were able to adapt to their new surroundings, a new culture, a new

political atmosphere—is added, again, the question of how this all translated into the art that incoming artists continued to create. Some artists never really found a home here and returned to Europe after the war—to Germany itself in some cases—and needed to adjust yet again to a new reality back there. Rudy Lesser (1902–1988) exemplifies this: having arrived here in 1946 by way of a wartime refuge in Scandinavia, he returned to Germany a decade after the war, never having found his comfort zone in the United States despite a fair degree of artistic success here. He ended up finding *home* again in Germany, even in his birth city, Berlin—but not as a widely recognized artist.

In some cases, some particular tragedy experienced in the United States led to a return flight to Europe as soon as that became feasible. Marc Chagall (1887–1985) was one of the more famous examples of this: He was able to leave France for New York through an artist-rescue program put into place by Varian Fry, with the cooperating invitation of Alfred Barr, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, but never felt fully at home in America. On a very concrete, identity level, he found it difficult to repeat the linguistic self-transformation that accompanied his migration from Russian-governed Belarus in 1910—trading Russian and Yiddish for French (or at least adding French to Russian and Yiddish as primary instruments of verbal communication)—by adding or switching to English. More egregiously, the death of his wife, Bela, the love of his youth and his life, while they were living in Upper New York State, left an emotional hole so deep that, ultimately, it could only have some chance of being filled by going back to France a few years after the war. Given the Stalinist cultural, socioeconomic, and political shape that had accrued to his birth country by then, France had become his chosen home.

Rarely, an artist managed to hide out—exiled within the borders of Germany itself—reshaping an artistic path as if in a different country. Fritz Ascher (1893–1970) spent more than two years sheltered by Martha Grassmann, a close friend of his mother's, in the basement of a large house in the heart of the Gruenewald—the forested parkland on the edge of Berlin in which the Nazi brass had taken up residence during the war. Deprived of painting materials, he turned to poetry—and when he was able to return to painting after the war, the Germany that he had known had been replaced by a new and different Germany, and his subject matter and, to an extent, his style, underwent a significant series of transformations.

There were also, of course, hosts of artists who arrived onto these shores and stayed for the rest of their lives—but each of these has his or her own story of migration, adaptation, identity-transformation (or, rarely and miraculously, nontransformation), and artistic survival. Polish-born Arthur Szyk (1894–1951) was an established artist dividing his time between Poland and France when he moved to England in 1937, and arrived to permanent residence in the United States in 1940.¹⁸ He carried with him a prodigious talent for endless, perfectly rendered detail that he applied by way of watercolor, gouache, pen, and pencil on paper in an unprecedented style and of a quality that made him arguably the outstanding miniaturist and illuminator of the twentieth century, as well as the most important visual political satirist of his era.

The initial reason for his trip to the United States was to generate American support for the British and for the Polish government-in-exile's war cause. He had already developed a

following in the United States, however. One of the early series he had done on historical events while still in Europe was a group of thirty-two watercolors, *George Washington and His Times*, a tribute to the Revolutionary War and the first American president that he had begun in Paris in 1930, and that was exhibited at the Library of Congress in 1934. This in turn led to a commission from the American government to design a George Washington Bicentennial Medal. So, too, a series of twenty paintings devoted to the contributions of Poles to American history was exhibited in the Polish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Thus, he arrived in this country to a warm welcome within both the arts and the political communities and was able to replicate the success he experienced in Europe soon after arriving onto these shores. Eleanor Roosevelt dubbed him a "one-man army" for his uplifting work as the American participation in the war unfolded—his drawings were said to have been more popular with American GIs than pinup-girl posters.

Annie Albers (1899–1994)—born Annelise Elsa Frieda Fleischmann in Berlin—attended the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Hamburg for two months in 1920, and in 1922 began studies at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Women were barred from certain disciplines, and unable to gain admission to a glass workshop—taught by her future husband, Josef Albers—she reluctantly turned to the only workshop available to women: weaving, which, against her expectations, became her artistic love.

Fleischmann married Albers—who had rapidly become a "junior master" at the Bauhaus—in 1925. Later that year the school moved to Dessau, where she innovated and achieved recognition as a textile master, and in 1930, she received her Bauhaus diploma for innovative work: her use of a new material, cellophane, to design a sound-absorbing and light-reflecting wallcovering. The following year she became the head of the weaving workshop, making her one of the few women to hold such a senior role at the school. The Bauhaus at Dessau closed in 1932 under pressure from the Nazi party and moved briefly to Berlin, permanently closing a year later in August 1933. Annie—together with her husband, who was Catholic—fled Germany, arriving to America in November. They came first to North Carolina, where both had been invited to teach at the experimental Black Mountain College. She served as an assistant professor of art, and they remained there until 1949. During these years her design work, including weavings, were already being shown throughout the United States.

Friedel Dzubas (1915–1994) was born in Berlin, where he studied art before fleeing the Nazi regime in 1939 and settling in Manhattan. By the end of the 1940s and early 1950s he was part of the center of the art world defined by American Abstract Expressionism in New York City: he shared a studio with Helen Frankenthaler in the early 1950s, and his work was included in the path-breaking *Ninth Street Exhibition* of 1951 and in group exhibits at the renowned Leo Castelli Gallery. Dzubas went on to have a well-regarded career—both as a teacher at noteworthy colleges and universities throughout the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, and as a painter of unusually large and lyrical abstract works that were shown in more than sixty solo exhibitions around the world. For the purposes of this narrative, one of the more important aspects of Dzubas' identity, reflected in his art, is the duality that defined his religious affiliation: his father was Jewish and his mother Catholic, and his shifting sense of self as one or the other of these resonates—perhaps—through particular paintings and drawings done over the years.

Vienna-born Lili Renée (b. 1921) was placed on a *Kindertransport*, leaving her parents behind in Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938–1939. She arrived in Leeds, England, and lived there for two years, working as a servant, nanny, and candy striper while waiting for her parents to escape and follow her. When she received a letter from them saying they had managed to immigrate to America, she managed to find a way to join them, living in a rooming house on East Seventy-Second Street in Manhattan.

After studying for a time at the Arts Students' League and the School of the Visual Arts, she found work as a penciler and inker at *Fiction House*, which was seeking women to replace its male artists who had been drafted into the armed forces. She was eventually assigned to do the full illustrations for the *Fiction House* feature comic book, *Jane Martin*, starring a female pilot who worked in the male-dominated aviation industry. Her work on the feature, whose scripts are credited to "F. E. Lincoln," ran in *Wings Comics* #31–48 (March 1943–August 1944). Perhaps her most famous character was Señorita Rio, a South-of-the-border adventurer doing wartime espionage for the US government. This and other characters credited to Lily Renée were an early part of her extended involvement within particular corners of the American art and culture scene.

Eva Hesse (1936–1980), born in Hamburg, Germany, was two years old when her parents sent her and her older sister to the Netherlands to escape the Nazi regime—aboard one of the last *Kindertransport* trains. The family was united after nearly six months of separation, moved to England, and in 1939, immigrated to New York City, where she grew up and became an artist. Much of what became her thumbprint on contemporary sculpture developed while on a fellowship for a year-long artist's residency in an abandoned textile mill back in Germany in 1965: that year shaped a turning point in Hesse's career. Her early and protracted success within the New York art scene was abbreviated by the brain cancer that took her life at the age of 34.

There were many more artists who arrived onto these shores from Germany or from countries overrun by Germany, not only before and during the war but in its aftermath. They enriched—and their legacy continues to enrich—the art and culture scene of the United States, replenishing the already significant supply of artistic productivity to which immigrant artists had so substantially contributed from the era shortly before World War I to the beginning of World War II.

American receptivity to these incomers—like other aspects of the American relationship to religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, and to the issue of immigrants earlier (and later)—offered ambiguities. On the one hand there was the network organized in Vichy France by the aforementioned American Protestant journalist, Varian Fry (1907–1967),—that rescued between 2,500 and 4,000 anti-Nazi and Jewish refugees, including, as previously mentioned, Marc Chagall. While working as a foreign correspondent for the American journal *The Living Age*, Fry visited Berlin in 1935 and personally witnessed Nazi abuse against Jews on more than one occasion, which turned him into an ardent anti-Nazi—as he commented just after the war. Following that Berlin visit, Fry wrote about the savage treatment of Jews by Hitler's regime in *The New York Times*.

Greatly disturbed by what he saw, Fry helped raise money to support European anti-Nazi movements. Shortly after the invasion of France in June 1940, Fry and his friends formed the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), with support from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and others—including Miriam Davenport, a former art student at the Sorbonne; the heiress and art-lover, Mary Jayne Gold; the young academic, Albert O. Hirschman; Alfred Barr, Director of MoMA, and Barr's wife, art historian Margaret Scolari Barr; and significantly, Hiram Bingham IV, an American Vice Consul in Marseille who fought against the rather rampant anti-Semitism in the State Department and was personally responsible for issuing thousands of legal and illegal visas. By August 1940, Fry was in Marseille to represent the ERC. Streaming to his door came anti-Nazi writers, avant-garde artists, musicians, and hundreds of others—mainly Jews—desperately seeking a chance to escape Nazi-dominated France.

Beginning that autumn, despite the watchful eye of the collaborationist Vichy regime, Fry and a small group of volunteers hid people at the Villa Air-Bel until they could be smuggled out. More than 2,200 people were taken across the border to Spain and then to the safety of neutral Portugal, from where they made their way to the United States. Others were smuggled on board ships leaving Marseille for the French colony of Martinique, from where they could also get to the United States.

If this extraordinary rescue operation offered the most noteworthy instance of American efforts to embrace Jewish artists and others under threat from the Nazis and their collaborators, on the other hand, there were counterpart instances where a nativist mentality prevailed in preventing America from being open-armed and generous toward those requiring refuge—such as the failed Wagner-Rogers bill (proposed in February 1939 and died in committee by the summer) to admit 20,000 German, mainly Jewish, children over the immigration quota from greater Germany over a two-year-period; or the refusal to grant admittance to the 960 passengers on board the *St. Louis* in any American port that same summer.

Moreover, after the war had ended it remained challenging for most Jewish and other refugees from war-torn regions to immigrate to the United States, while at the same time Operation Overcast and Operation Paperclip made it feasible for over 1,000 former Nazis and Nazi collaborators to leapfrog over standard immigration obstacles—and to have their association with Nazism expunged from the historical record—if they were deemed to be of potential value against the Soviet Union in the expanding Cold War because they possessed the sort of scientific and technical skills useful either in the field of armaments innovation or the emerging realm of space exploration.

V. Looking into Darkness and Light

This interdisciplinary volume explores many of the issues and questions raised in summary form in the previous parts of this introduction. The narrative begins by considering several conceptual aspects of the layered reality of immigrant psychology against the specific backdrop of history and art history that centers on the time period of World War II and the Holocaust. The general discussion of the question of identity and how it is to be understood and carried

within members of our species—from the sociology to the psychology of language and cultural norms, including the visual arts—that marked the opening pages of this essay is followed by a detailed consideration, in chapter one, of how identity is transformed—or not—by immigration from one locale and culture to another, specifically with regard to immigrants to the United States.

This will in turn lead, in chapter two, to a detailed historical examination of the Nazi period in Germany and how racial, religious, cultural, and political identity was shaped into extreme policies of inclusion and exclusion, necessitating a substantial emigration of individuals at first marginalized and subsequently in danger of extermination based on the evolution of those policies—and how, on the other hand, the United States welcomed or failed to welcome refugees from Nazi-controlled Europe during and immediately after the war. What were our immigration policies, how were they applied under these most extreme conditions—and why?

There is a profound darkness to both introductory essays, facing, as each of them does, unhappy realities that resonate from an America that, for all its exceptional kindness and generosity, can be and has been both cruel and withholding in many ways over the course of our relatively brief history. If we are to continue toward becoming more completely the best that our founders envisioned for us, then we cannot turn away from the dark parts of our past—or present—simply because studying ourselves in that mirror makes us uncomfortable.

These discussions are followed by seven essays that serve as a particularized group of case studies by examining the life and work of seven particular artists. Four came from Germany (Lesser, Dzugas, Albers, and Hesse); Renée came from Austria through England; Szyk came from Poland and France by way of England and Canada. All six of these individuals were affected in different ways by Nazi policies and came as refugees to the United States, remaining or ultimately not remaining here. The seventh, Ascher, survived in hiding within Germany—an internal migration—throughout the war. The life and work of each of these artists address the issue of identity and the particulars of its expression from slightly different angles. As a compendium, they serve as an intensified and emphatic articulation of the broader issues of relocation: the transformation and the shaping of the psychological and cultural self as a centerpiece of human *being in the world* and how these issues resonate in artwork produced over time.

While the Nazi period and its aftermath offer a particularly intense time-focus from within the larger sweep of history, the questions raised in the essays in this volume offer relevance not merely for ruminating about the past. Our own era—with its unparalleled patterns of migration and its unprecedented numbers of refugees removing themselves under duress from one region or another to other parts of the planet, and in which the question of American identity and the American relationship with racial and religious minorities and with immigrants has moved to the center of the national conversation—is one for which the narrative in the pages that follow is particularly relevant. If there is darkness in all nine essays, one can and should discern light scattered among the shadows in both the lives and the art of the seven protagonists. The array of words and images offers a significant starting point for the attempt to understand not only what we Americans are as a nation, but what we humans are as a species.

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1. "Make America Great Again," Donald Trump's presidential campaign slogan, continues to be invoked.
 2. This was in Grant's 1885 *Memoir on the Mexican War*. He further observed that it "was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies . . ."
 3. To be more precise: On June 2, 1924, Congress enacted the Indian Citizenship Act, which granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the US. The right to vote, however, was governed by state law. Until 1957, some states barred Native Americans from voting, and in general terms they faced some of the same barriers as Blacks until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, including Jim Crow-like tactics and poll taxes.
 4. For the purposes of this discussion, I am ignoring Wilson's own self-contradictory, racist policies and sentiments.
 5. Interestingly, the song was filed away and not released for 20 years. It came to light in 1938, when singer Kate Smith was searching for a patriotic song to sing on the twentieth anniversary of Armistice Day.
 6. Woollcott was working on a biography of the 36-year-old phenom, *The Story of Irving Berlin*.
 7. The Gershwin quote can be found in Robert Wyatt and John A. Johnson, *The George Gershwin Reader* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 117.
 8. For a brief explanation of "Muscular Judaism," see Soltes, *God and the Goalposts*, revised edition (Washington, DC: Bartleby Press, 2021), 171-2.
 9. Greenberg was the American League's Most Valuable Player in 1935 as a first baseman and again in 1940 as a left fielder. He drove in 183 runs in 1937, and most famously, 58 home runs in 1938—the very year in which, two months after the end of the baseball season, Nazi violence against German Jews would reach its first crescendo with Kristallnacht.
 10. For a more detailed discussion of this and of the relationship between American Jews and baseball, see Soltes: "Centerfield of Dreams and Questions: Baseball and Judaism," in Judith Z. Abrams and Marc Lee Raphael, eds., *What Is Jewish About American's "Favorite Pastime"? Essays and Sermons on Jews, Judaism, and Baseball* (Williamsburg, VA: College of William and Mary Press, 20016). For a more detailed discussion of Jews in American sports in general, see Soltes, *God and the Goalposts*, chapters 9, 10 and 12. (See n.8.)
 11. For more detail, see Soltes, *God and the Goalposts*, chapter 12.
 12. Weber was born in Bialystok, which was at that time part of the Russian Empire; it would later return to being part of Poland.
 13. Einstein had published a paper on the Special Theory of Relativity in 1905 and then worked gradually on the General Theory of Relativity between about 1907 and 1915.
 14. Briefly: the pregnancy period of American film might be said to have arrived in 1878 with Muybridge's 24 stereoscopic images of a horse in motion. By 1893 Thomas Edison had introduced the Kinetoscope and the Kinetograph at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. By 1906 the novelties had become public entertainment and big business—and by 1927, with Al Jolson in "The Jazz Singer," cinematic images accompanied by sound had set the movie industry on a rapid course toward its expansion into the present millennium.
 15. Ben Shahn, quoted in Frances K. Pohl, *Ben Shahn* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1993), 12.
 16. Lowell was an enigmatic figure. He was a legal scholar and, as president of Harvard from 1909 to 1933, a broad-minded, liberalizing educator—who nonetheless tried to put into place university legislation that would segregate African American freshmen from their peers by denying them housing in the freshmen dorms; and expanded Harvard's enrollment of Jews but then tried to limit the Jewish presence by a quota system (which he argued was both for their benefit in an era of rising anti-Semitism and for the sake of Harvard, which would otherwise begin to lose its blue-blood students). Excoriated as a "traitor to his class" for his progressive educational ideology, he was also condemned as exhibiting "loyalty to his class" for his role in the Sacco and Vanzetti review.
 17. The phrase *two-world condition* was coined by Jamey Gambrell in several articles in *Art in America* in the 1980s. Emulating Gambrell, I first coined the phrase *three-world condition* in two catalogue essays for exhibitions at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, DC: Ori Z Soltes, *Old Voices, New Faces: (Soviet) Jewish Artists from the 1920s–1990s* (1992); and Ori Z Soltes, *Here and There; Then and Now: Contemporary Artists from the Former Soviet Union* (1996–1997).

18. Szyk also spent some time in Palestine, in 1914, as part of a Polish Jewish artists' and writers' group, but that visit was cut short by the outbreak of World War I. Toward the outset of that war he was conscripted into the Russian army and fought at the battle of Łódź, his hometown, in November–December 1914.