ABSTRACT

SPERLING, ANDREW DAVID. Creative Power: Viktor Lowenfeld as a Jewish Refugee in the Jim Crow South (Under the direction of Dr. Noah B. Strote).

This thesis explores the historical alliance between Jewish refugees, fleeing from Nazi-occupied Europe, and African American art students in the Jim Crow South. Told largely from the perspective of an Austrian-Jewish art educator, Viktor Lowenfeld, and his two most celebrated students, John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis, this thesis examines how a complex culture of shared empathy emerged in the most unlikely of places in order to create politically radical works of art which challenged antisemitism and racism. Lowenfeld's qualities as an artist were anathema to fascist ideologies which vilified Jewish intellectualism and modernist art expression, and his experiences in Vienna teaching art to the blind, considered "degenerates" by promoters of Nazism, marked the beginning of his politically subversive career. Fleeing in 1938 and finding employment at the Hampton Institute in Virginia, Lowenfeld continued to encourage political resistance through the production of art, this time within the spaces of a historically Black institution. The artistry that developed at the Hampton Institute allowed processes of identity affirmation and reclamation to occur. As Lowenfeld relied on his experiences of persecution to relate to students, he effectively strengthened and weaponized his Jewish identity, while his students used creative expression to redefine their own aesthetic and cultural heritages.

This thesis reimagines the dynamic between Jewish and African American activists to include artistic, pedagogical and transnational frameworks. It challenges scholarship that colors this historical alliance with excessive pessimism, while still recognizing the strains of tension within as exemplified by Lowenfeld's relationship with Biggers and Lewis. Furthermore, it works in opposition to myths that Jews' participation in rising Civil Rights rhetoric and interests

were motivated by desires to shed their Jewish identities and become mainstream members of white society, as the narrative instead demonstrates a reinforcement of Jewishness in Lowenfeld.

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Creative Power: Viktor Lowenfeld as a Jewish Refugee in the Jim Crow South

by
Andrew David Sperling

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APPROVED BY:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the central figures it involves: Viktor Lowenfeld, John T. Biggers, Samella Lewis, and the refugee scholars and Hampton artists who persisted through hardship.

BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Sperling was born in Port Jefferson, New York, and completed his undergraduate degree at North Carolina State University at Raleigh in May 2016, studying English literature with a minor in History. In the fall of 2017, he enrolled in the master's program in History at NC State. His research interests include Jewish history, Jewish emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern African American history, and architectural and art history. He will continue his studies in History at American University's PhD program in 2019.

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At many points during my research and writing process, this thesis felt like a collaborative effort as I received invaluable advice, encouragement and direction from NC State faculty and other scholars. I must first thank Professor Noah Strote for leading me to the topic of Jewish refugee scholars over coffee at the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester. Through every conceptual roadblock and dead end, he has been a committed advisor who has offered me insights and techniques that I had never considered. As both his student and teaching assistant, I learned how to develop interesting and thoughtful historical problems that have sustained my passion in history as a discipline. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Professors Blair Kelley and Michelle Eley for their support and flexibility during several stressful periods in my graduate career. Professor Kelley has shifted my thinking on a number of subjects and has introduced me to literature and ideas that influenced the shaping of this thesis and my perception of history, identity and memory altogether. Professor Eley was instrumental in my decision to study German in Germany, and it was there that my connection to Jewish identity strengthened and informed the passion behind this thesis' narrative construction.

I would also like to thank the NC State History department for its support and funding, which enabled me to visit archives that were crucial to this project. The librarians and staff at Penn State and Emory have my gratitude for their helpfulness and interest in my work. Many of my fellow graduate students have also made this experience incredibly rewarding and engaging, while my family instilled the confidence in me that led to my completion of the thesis and degree.

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INTRODUCTION:

"The Scorned Can Also Scorn"

Writing in 1942, the future Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ralph J. Bunche, then the head of the Political Science department at Howard University, solemnly reflected on the persecution of European Jews. "Race," he wrote, in an observation which still endures today, "has become the handmaiden of politics in the modern world."[1] It is an "indispensable tool" which pervades every space of social life, stoking hateful emotions and breeding dislike, scorn and mistrust.[2] When he articulated these points, Bunche, the first African American to receive the aforementioned honor, was less concerned with the racial hatred felt by societal majorities toward minority groups. His goal was to expose the ways in which racial attitudes infected and mentally enslaved even those who were most harmed by them. To this end, Bunche lamented how Jews exhibited "the same prejudiced, stereotyped attitudes toward Negroes that are characteristic of so many members of the dominant Gentile population."[3] The reverse was also true, as likewise, "Negroes embrace enthusiastically the anti-Jewish concepts which have attained wide currency, and adapt them to their own devices."[4]

These ingrained prejudices, shared by two oppressed peoples, were as inevitable as they were frustrating and illogical. In American popular culture, unflattering images of the Jew were embedded into young and impressionable minds through children's cartoons.[5] In political discourse, the Jew was an economic and cultural menace. Among common men and women, the

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[1]Ralph J. Bunche, "Foreward," in *The Reaction of Negro Publications and Organizations to German anti-Semitism,* ed. Lunabelle Wedlock (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1942), 1-10.
[2] Ibid., 2.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 8.
[5] George Goodwin, "More Than a Laughing Matter: Cartoons and Jews." *Modern Judaism* 21, no. 2 (2001): 146-174.

Jew had his own set of racial traits; he was aggressive, clannish, and nefariously intelligent. In Bunche's view, "it perhaps gives the Negro some comfort to know that another group in this nation is also the victim of racial antipathy."[6] But the motivations behind Black antisemitism went beyond cultural immersion and those feelings of relief at shared afflictions. American Jews were often seen as exploitative landlords, retailers and employers in Black neighborhoods. And, just as the predominant culture fostered antisemitism, many Jews could not avoid harboring racist sentiments as white citizens of an anti-Black nation. It was this mirroring of experiences between two minority groups that prompted Bunche to call for a political and activistic alliance, especially as Hitler's tyranny over European Jews intensified and landed itself across America's headlines.

The topic of Black and Jewish alliances in efforts to abolish racially intolerant systems has a long and complex historiography. Many early works exploring this dynamic are pointedly enthusiastic about the potential for mutual benefit in the development of such political coalitions. Black political commentaries of the 1940s, much like Bunche's, stressed similar histories and trajectories between the two groups and articulated the need for Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. James Stemons' *As Victim to Victims: An American Negro Laments with Jews* positioned the troubles posed by Nazi Germany as a direct counterpart to racism in the United States.[7] In 1943, The Negro Publication Society released *Should Negroes and Jews Unite?*, its title a rhetorical question.[8] Post-war scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s characterizes Black relationships with Jews as relatively positive compared to those with white majority groups, and especially emphasizes the success of Jewish activists fighting in favor of Black civil rights.

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[6] Bunche, "Foreward," 9.

[7] James Stemons, *As Victim to Victims: An American Negro Laments with Jews,* (New York: Fortuny's, 1941).

[8] L.D. Reddick and Louis Harap, *Should Negroes and Jews Unite?* (New York: Negro Publication Society of America, 1943).

Sanford Goldner's 1953 book *The Jewish People and the Fight for Negro Rights*, for instance, maintains that Jews had always been natural supporters of African American communities.[9] Goldner's claim was echoed throughout the 1960s by other Jewish writers, including Rabbi P. Allen Krause, who conducted surveys among Southern Rabbis to collect opinions on the Civil Rights Movement. In his unpublished master's thesis, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," Krause found that such rabbis were passionate desegregationists. These optimistic views of Black and Jewish relations were not confined to liberal Jewish scholars.[10] In his 1965 book *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power,* African American psychologist Kenneth Clark praised the contributions of Jewish groups in making the March on Washington a success, and for awakening "the dormant conscience of the American people." Jews under this analysis were able to effectively weaponize their "whiteness" to procure sympathy for the African American cause, while also depending on the fresh memory of the Holocaust to alert Americans to the dangers of racial intolerance.[11] This possibility was also the suggestion of Hasia Diner, prominent historian of American Jewry, in her 1975 doctoral dissertation, "In The Almost Promised Land: Jewish Leaders and Blacks, 1915-1935," wherein she claims that Jewish efforts to establish empathy and relatability with African Americans was itself a process of acculturation.

By connecting with and advocating for African American causes specific to the United States, Diner says, these Jews had proven their assimilated Americanness through their full immersion in American social discourse.[12] This thesis meets Diner's assertion halfway and extends

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[9] Samuel Goldner, *The Jewish People and the Fight for Negro Rights* (Los Angeles: Committee for Negro-Jewish Relations, 1953).

[10] P. Allen Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," Unpublished Master's Thesis (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1967).

[11] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 119.

[12] Hasia Diner, "In The Almost Promised Land: Jewish Leaders and Blacks, 1915-1935," (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

her chronological framework deeper into the Nazi period. The narrative presented here agrees that Jews held substantial and genuine interests in forging empathetic connections with African Americans, but suggests that this was the opposite of integration into white society in part because it emphasized rather than shrouded Jewishness. By invoking the trauma of Nazi persecution against Jews in an American setting, such voices drew attention to the Jewish aspect of their political and cultural identities. This was especially true in artistic spaces, as revealed in this narrative centered on Viktor Lowenfeld, Austrian-Jewish refugee and art educator from 1939 to 1946 at the Hampton Institute, a HBCU in Virginia. Under his art program at Hampton, African American students also creatively expressed proud reclamations of their group identity and in doing so, chipped away at stereotypical perceptions of the dominant white society. These expressions occurred explicitly as a result of Lowenfeld's experiences as a Jewish artist and refugee, and the collaborative dynamic between him and his students is early evidence of both groups embracing their distinct identities through artistry. For both Lowenfeld and his students, these actions were markedly political in nature, as the former inverted Austro-German concepts of appropriate art and the latter rebelled entirely against societal expectations for African Americans.

This narrative, with its attention to productive collaboration, however, has its own challenges and modifications in the literature on Black and Jewish alliances from scholars seeking to avoid romanticization. Early resistance to idealistic depictions of this dynamic evolved throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the peak of Black Power. Though prior scholarship recognized the role of Jews in civil rights groups like CORE and SNCC, as well as their targeting by the Ku Klux Klan, by these decades tensions between the two groups were significant enough to alter the tone of the pertinent scholarship. Historian Lenwood G. Davis located the source of this straining in a number of historical moments: rioting in the Northern

ghettos causing the destruction of Jewish establishments, the decreasing number of Jews in favor of integrated public schools, conflicts in Crown Heights, and Black support for Arab and Palestinian causes.[13] As such, publications like Arthur Stein and Robert Weisbord's *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew,* released in 1970, presented a history of disparities and only limited cooperation between Jewish and African American political bodies.[14]

By the 1980s, the scholarship's characterization of this history once again changed dramatically as relations improved. Jewish and Black organizations collaborated under the idea of resolving issues and misunderstandings, a proposal reflected in Joyce Gelb's *Beyond Conflict: Black-Jewish Relations: Accent on The Positive*. In the 1980 publication, Gelb relitigates the history of such relations and explicitly asks that people focus on positive moments.[15] These fluctuations in the characterization of Black and Jewish historical dynamics have been dependent on the societal realities of the scholars doing the work. When the existing relationship is healthy, its history is rendered positive and optimistic; when troubles emerge, scholars question the validity of nostalgic histories and the encounters are rendered "bittersweet." Yet this historiography on the topic between the 1940s and 1980s is comparatively scarce to the boom in scholarship which occurred in the 1990s, perhaps a consequence of the 1991 Crown Heights riots in which tensions between African Americans and Jews boiled over into violence. Under another period of disunity and strife, historiographical reflections on Jewish and Black relations were tinged with dismay and distress. As the 1995 title of Michael Lerner and Cornel West's *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin* suggests, scholars approached this history with an urgent agenda to promote positive

[13] Lenwood G. Davis, *Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, 1752-1984* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1984).
[14] Robert G. Weisbord and Benjamin Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew* (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1970).
[15] Joyce Gelb, *Beyond Conflict: Black-Jewish Relations: Accent on The Positive* (New York: Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity, American Jewish Committee, 1980).

progress between the two groups. That required an honesty as to the complexities of the once glorified alliance. In West's second publication on the topic, co-edited with Jack Salzman in 1997, *Strangers in the Promised Land* presented these complicated histories which did not deny the presence of a symbiotic Black and Jewish relationship, but pointed to economic and social truths which often made it antagonistic.[16] There is a striking lack of commentary on the artistic and educational dimensions of this dynamic because the majority of scholars view it mainly through economic, cultural and activistic prisms. Somehow, even cultural and activistic considerations of Black and Jewish alliances eschew artistry, as if the work created by Lowenfeld and his students were not inherently political reflections of their own cultural legacies.

In similar neglect of artistic alliances, Paul Berman's 1994 collection of essays, *Blacks and Jews: Of Alliances and Arguments* highlights a "political cooperation" only in "trade unions, left-wing and liberal organizations, and in the civil rights campaigns," with no remarks from any scholar on how this might have taken shape in creative encounters.[17] Murray Friedman's 1995 book *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*, its title an accurate reflection of the mournful mood which prompted scholars like Lerner and West to advocate a healing process, was perhaps the first to substantively address art. Friedman challenges the pessimism of 1990s scholarship by asking the reader to accept that despite some issues with unflattering representation, "Jews did open opportunities for talented Black artists, writers, and entertainers long before other white Americans were prepared to do so."[18]

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[16] Cornel West and Jack Salzman, *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[17] Paul Berman, *Blacks and Jews: Of Alliances and Arguments* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994).
[18] Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 118.

Yet his treatment is exclusively concerned with African Americans and Jews in film, theatrical and literary artistry, not the visual sort which Lowenfeld and his students created. Lowenfeld's unique approach and philosophy, informed by his experiences as a Jewish refugee and intellectual, allowed his students to avoid stereotypical caricatures seen in many Hollywood productions. In fact, his particular emphasis on group consciousness and the reclamation of heritage actively fought against stereotyping by larger society. Milly Heyd's 1999 monograph, *Mutual Reflections: Jews and Blacks in American Art* is the most substantial piece of literature on this precise facet of the Black and Jewish political dynamic. Heyd, in line with other 90s historians, acknowledges discomfort and mutual intolerance among Black and Jewish communities, but unearths little known details about Jewish philanthropy in American art. Numerous fellowships funded by Jewish donors helped Black modern art flourish, and enabled many artists to travel abroad, mainly to Paris.[19]

Heyd further laments that the historiography on Black and Jewish relations has lacked a "visual dimension," and it is the intention of this thesis to help fill the gap. The story of Lowenfeld and his students complicates Heyd's findings in two primary ways. Rather than push his students toward European masters or Parisian influences, Lowenfeld encouraged them to accept African aesthetics. Though his influence on their work was considerable, the relationship was reciprocal by his own admission, not merely marked by patronage. The opportunity to teach at an exclusively Black school, Lowenfeld thought, was a chance at pedagogical enrichment. The artistry he helped foster at the Hampton Institute was also mutually beneficial in its Holocaust consciousness, as the work created after the war processed the trauma while applying it to specific concerns in the American racial system. The art was therefore, in fact, political, making the absence of Jewish and

[19] Milly Heyd, *Mutual Reflections: Jews and Blacks in American Art* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

Black artistic collaboration in the overall historiography a regrettable one. If scholars have been questioning the extent to which these alliances were effective, then in turning to art as exemplified in this narrative, they will find at least one promising answer. The artistic closeness which developed at Hampton reveals that through creative expression, empathy was possible and served as the basis for identification with both the degraded "Other" and the self. The optimism in such a story, however, might prove problematic to some contemporary historians whose commentaries on Black and Jewish historical relations are notably more cynical than in the 1990s. A source of unease among such scholars is the suggestion that Jewish allies felt compelled to act in the Civil Rights Movement as a result of their own social marginalization. Lowenfeld, having died in 1960, did not live long enough to participate in the peak years of political activism, but it is certainly this thesis' suggestion that his experiences with persecution allowed him a particularly sympathetic view of socially maligned groups.

In his recent book, *Black Power, Jewish Politics*, Marc Dollinger opposes this theory of shared marginalization by writing that by the 1950s, "American Jews enjoyed the privileges of inclusion in the white middle class" and had "already separated themselves from blacks, both physically and sociologically."[20] Marginalization of the Jews could not have been a motivating factor in Jewish allegiance, according to Dollinger, or else the movement would have started fifty years earlier.[21] Dollinger's assertions here are faulty in that, though Jews may have ascended the American social hierarchy by the 1950s, we must account for the freshness of the Holocaust in Jewish perspectives as significant. The tragic memory of the six million victims did not perish

[20] Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2018), 30.
[21] Leah Donnella, "Exploding Myths About 'Black Power, Jewish Politics," *Code Switch* (blog), NPR, June 4, 2018, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/06/04/613683819/exploding-myths-about-black-power-jewishpolitics

within a decade, nor did issues of American antisemitism disappear entirely, most especially with the Rosenberg executions reawakening Jewish anxieties about their security as citizens. These particular moments in Jewish history may have very well been factors which motivated Jews to partake in the Civil Rights Movement against the proliferation and preservation of white supremacy. Though historical transparency should avoid romanticizing white allies, scholars such as Dollinger must not be so concerned with combating exaggeration that basic realities are ignored.

In 2018's *On Middle Ground*, Eric Goldstein and Deborah Weiner remark on the "openness" American Jews showed to their African American neighbors. Relying on oral histories, they report the idea shared among some African Americans that Jews held "a whole different way of thinking," an empathetic understanding that stemmed from their own histories of oppression.[22] The extent to which this could be true is one of the questions to be considered throughout this study. To determine the particular empathy Jews held for Black people is a delicate balancing act. As Goldstein had written earlier in *The Price of Whiteness*, Jews today face a unique dilemma as they have fully merged with white society, no longer a "race" as they were in 1945. Now, Goldstein argues, "Jews have turned to the African American community in unprecedented ways in order to validate their own minority consciousness."[23] In other words, Jews feel discomfort as white Americans as it aligns them with society's most privileged, and may position themselves as noble characters within African American history as a means of redemption from complicity. While Goldstein made those assertions in 2006, they feel strikingly more relevant in 2019's political landscape when, to reiterate Bunche's expression, race is undeniably the handmaiden of politics. Awareness of one's standing in the racial hierarchy is a tenet that is strongly emphasized in left-

[22] Deborah Weiner and Eric Goldstein, *On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), 281.
[23] Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 211.

wing circles of political activism. The concept of modern-day Jews utilizing African American history as a tool against feelings of white guilt, then, is provocative but compelling to this Jewish writer, as I realize now how easily I may fit Goldstein's description. In fact, this study revolves around a sympathetic Jewish figure whose interactions with his African American contemporaries are mostly positive, productive and often heroicized by those directly involved. It is all the more important, then, that this study is transparent with regards to these issues and with its intentions.

Bunche concluded his brief essay with a plea to his readers, asking "that both Negro and Jewish organizations" reach a place of "intelligent cooperation … toward the solution of their common problems."[24] This study advocates for the same, with the understanding that the difficulties faced by Jews today is significantly less than in the past. Still, the racial and ethnic prejudices which have become normalized in Donald Trump's America have naturally strengthened the minority consciousness among Jews to which Goldstein refers. Shootings against both African Americans and Jews in their spaces of worship have only furthered this trend. Bearing this in mind, there is value to be found in Black and Jewish alliances today. A strong and distinctive element of Jewish consciousness, including that of mine and my family's, is the emotional and even psychological legacy of the Holocaust. To be a "good Jew" is, among many other things, to commemorate and honor the lives of those who perished. That this is such an enduring facet of Jewish culture and education means Jews should fully understand the dangers of poor treatment aimed at minority groups. Jews, more than any other group of whites, are more attuned the rhetoric of racism, and perhaps this can compel Jewish allies to help dismantle systems of white supremacy, systems which may be abolished through interracial collaboration. Lowenfeld's narrative is reflective of the kind of dismantling which could occur through processes of identity affirmation,

[24] Bunche, "Foreward," 10.

group solidarity and substantive efforts to resist narrow-minded tropes, qualities he exhibited throughout his career.

This is a study on Black and Jewish alliances, but within a very particular context. As mentioned, scholars have thoroughly considered the intricacies of this allegiance before. Yet the scholarship lacks attention to two dynamics which may be most revelatory: the relationships between African Americans and Jewish artists, and Jewish refugees who come from heightened experiences of persecution. Unlike most American-born Jews, or Jews who had settled in America before facing the consequences of Nazism's rise in Europe, Jewish refugees fleeing from Hitler carried with them the distinction of having almost been killed for their Jewishness. They would have understood the consequences and concerns of being classified as an undesirable race and, in fact, several European Jews were unaware of their Jewishness until it suddenly left them ostracized. This study will question how the categorization of Jews into a race of their own translated into Jewish perceptions of African Americans in the United States, as they settled in as refugees, themselves safe, but hardly distant from a racialized and undemocratic society.

Understanding the culture that evolved from Jewish refugees' interactions with African Americans is not a task that should be considered broadly. In focusing on three main figures, Lowenfeld and his two most well-known students, John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis, this study intends to present a rich analysis that is more introspective and more intimate than if more people were introduced to the narrative. Together, Lowenfeld, Biggers and Lewis conceptualized art in ways unique to the field at the time, and it was in these artistic spaces that self-expression gave way to understanding one's own social standing in the world. The art was cathartic as an exercise, but in the Jim Crow South, it was equally threatening and impractical: threatening in its capability

to so vividly depict social injustices, impractical in its seeming worthlessness in procuring a career in an age where African Americans sought reliable employment.

The experiences at Hampton, shared by these artists, naturally beg a set of questions related to both political allegiances and Jewish emigration. Lowenfeld's very existence, as both a man and an artist, was antithetical to the prevailing culture of Nazi antisemitism which swept through his Viennese environment. He was a Jewish intellectual whose most basic principles represented the worst of modernist thought and practice to those promoting Nazism or even social conservatism. As Lowenfeld taught art to the blind while in Vienna against the advice of disapproving critics, then perhaps even the simple engagement of teaching art was itself a conscious act of resistance. The extent to which this could be considered true in Lowenfeld's story is one of the driving questions of this study, and if the answer is affirmative, it necessarily changes the way scholars should look at Jewish refugees to America.

Additionally, if producing art in collaboration with Lowenfeld's philosophies was conscious resistance for students like Biggers and Lewis, then scholars should re-examine Black and Jewish alliances in search of its particularly creative power. In this view, Lowenfeld, Biggers and Lewis would have all been seeking a space for both physical security and intellectual liberty, where social activism is implicit in the spreading of ideas. This study also locates the methods and philosophies which Lowenfeld taught with as having originated from artistic movements in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century, namely those of Secessionism and Expressionism. In Secessionist thought, art had the capacity to radically transform society by rejecting historicism, or the imitation and recreation of historical aesthetics, and allowing for a plurality of styles, most containing modernist and abstract flourishes.[25] The Viennese Secession was, essentially, the

[25] Kevin Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth Century Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 68.

Austro-German branch of Art Nouveau.[26] Lowenfeld's teaching most prominently reflected the anti-historicist strand of Secessionist thinking, as he urged his students to create art with purity not infected by cultural standards. In the Expressionist sense, Lowenfeld was a strong advocate of subjective art which could appropriately depict the artist's inner emotions stemming from his or her outer social world.

Lowenfeld conceptualized his art and teaching through these two Germanic frameworks, and when he pioneered Hampton Institute's art program, it was through these influences that 165 African Americans students depicted themselves in art. This study therefore considers the role of art as a bridge for connecting disparate groups, and it is through this coming together at Hampton that one can see evidence of art's ability to procure a unique form of social bonding across racial barriers. Through artistic processes, Lowenfeld and his students could better understand one another's hardships, even in an American society where, like Ralph J. Bunche articulated, minority groups were immersed in disparaging characterizations of each other.

The resistance to African American art production governed by whites was worded perhaps most strongly in Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, published in 1967. Cruse, a prominent social commentator, specifically targeted Jews as having "retarded and smothered" Black artists with their own cultural and political standards, and as a result, stifled the development of Black art.[27] This study instead searches for a more complex view in which Jewish influence is not akin to Black suppression. Cruse's assertion is suspiciously similar to antisemitic claims of Jewish internationalism and widespread control, and he denies African American artists their awareness of their own artistic evolutions. Biggers and Lewis were intellectually capable enough

[26] Ibid.
[27] Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*, 73.

to accept Lowenfeld's teachings without compromising their creative integrity, and a proper study of Black and Jewish connectivity must find a fair balance between acknowledging genuine cultural exchange and avoiding giving whites a disproportionate amount of credit.

Special attention must also be given to the role of higher education and mentorship dynamics in this study. Jewish refugee scholars were often placed by aid societies and organizations in historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), many times out of necessity, as some predominantly white institutions would not hire Jews.[28] The role of the German-Jewish academic in these new African American spaces is most compelling if one looks for evidence of cultural transference and transformation. In Europe, Jewish intellectuals such as Lowenfeld were vilified as enemies against the German body politic. This study takes these antisemitic attitudes into account in order to ascertain the prominence of resistance in Lowenfeld's experience, and to reflect on the potential stereotypes African Americans held against these new thinkers. Lowenfeld came to Hampton not as a rookie, but as an experienced educator, having taught both children and the blind in Austria. This study will trace continuities in how Lowenfeld engaged with each group as an educator. Children, in his view, were among the purest of artists, not yet fully lost in their society's historicist standards and structures. The blind, too, were inherently Expressionist artists, and the "Negro artist", according to Lowenfeld, was similarly predisposed to certain aesthetics and artistic processes. Lowenfeld's perspective here was complicated: it engaged in a certain kind of exoticism that is not surprising given his bourgeois upbringing, but it was also grounded in the real observation that African American artists existed in a tumultuous and disorienting society, which in turn naturally produced art which skewed abstract. It is possible that Lowenfeld perceived his child students and his African American students in much the same way, a comparison which

[28] Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993).

would have placed him in a dominant role on the social hierarchy. The mentor-mentee dynamic which, at least in Lowenfeld's relationship with Biggers, might have mirrored that of father-son is both a testament to the strength of artistic collaboration and a sign of the problematic limitations of allyship where there is an imbalance of power and privilege.

Considering these issues sustains the current historical discussions on African American and Jewish partnership while adding new and distinctive dimensions. While scholars of the past have considered a multitude of factors complicating the relationship, few have been attentive to artistic collaborations. The artistry presented in this narrative demonstrates how political alliances could develop outside of the traditional spaces, and how exchanges rooted in marginalized identities occurred so that real social progress could be made in the creation of cathartic art. This catharsis was a connector to Black and Jewish cultural heritages which allowed for active resistance against larger oppressive societies which sought to claim them. Art expression is a personal endeavor for all of those who engage. It forces the artist to pull out the most sensitive and vulnerable parts of his or herself in order to produce something with meaning. Though it does not heal all wounds, the exercise of self-expression is one step on the path toward liberation. This study follows the ways in which oppressed individuals translate their experiences into works of art, while learning from one another in collaborative efforts to come to terms with and fight intolerable social realities. It also considers how refugees behave as scholars and artists in lands that are entirely new and foreign, and the cultural and ideological transferences which necessarily occur in the process. The most central characters -- Viktor Lowenfeld, John Biggers and Samella Lewis -- emerge from sites of racial hatred and breeding grounds of resentment, and yet they are complex testaments to how individuals can transcend the barriers placed in their ways in order to

serve as fine examples of civilized humanity. Their story, however gray it is in some places, shines a bright light on the power of empathy and collaboration in art.

The first chapter, "To Art Its Freedom," begins in Vienna, Austria, where a young Lowenfeld walked into a cacophony of competing ideas and theories as to the meaning and value of art. He spent his days learning how to think and how to teach, in the company of many famous faces, from Franz Cizek to Sigmund Freud. In his earliest stages of creative development, Lowenfeld was bored with rigid structuralism and longed for the liberty of free expression. A variety of influences assisted in his development as yet another name to be learned and recognized within artistic circles, but this process of discovering himself as an artist, thinker and Jew was marred by growing antisemitism which eventually resulted in the *Anschluss*, Austria's annexation into Germany. Lowenfeld's experiences as a Jewish youth and artist intersected so that he developed philosophies aimed at procuring identity consciousness, an idea which he blended with Zionist politics and a pride in one's heritage. These politics of liberation were combined with his early experiments in teaching art to the blind, another marginalized group who needed art as a vehicle for expression. The chapter ends with Lowenfeld forcibly displaced from Vienna, fleeing with his family to safety, which turned out to be the unfamiliar territory that was the United States.

The second chapter, entitled "The Rescue of Learning," follows Lowenfeld's journey as a refugee seeking employment as an art educator. It additionally contextualizes the institutional history behind Hampton Institute, where Lowenfeld would eventually be employed. The school touted an "education for life" philosophy, but white financiers only wished to train African American students for agricultural and industrial jobs, upholding racial hierarchies and images of a nostalgic Old South. A series of circumstances had to occur before Lowenfeld's art program became a feasible reality in such an institution. The chapter introduces key Lowenfeldian theories

of creative processes, including his haptic-visual theory which he applied to his African American students. It is suggested that this theory was colored by strains of exoticism, just as his early interactions with African Americans might have involved paternalistic inclinations. While these interpretations present Lowenfeld as unable to completely escape white society's views of African Americans, the chapter still links his emphasis on African heritage to his own process of Jewish identity affirmation in Austria. Based on African American newspaper publications, the chapter further addresses how Jews, and especially those under Nazi Europe, might have been received among communities like Hampton.

The third and final chapter, "Art Finds Its Salvation," further stresses how art served as a cultural connector, but not without its complications in pedagogical dynamics, as the Viennese, cosmopolitan Lowenfeld was suddenly tasked with acting as an educator in the Jim Crow South. John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis are introduced into the narrative as two students with whom Lowenfeld interacted, although the nature of each relationship differed. The former viewed Lowenfeld as a father figure whose ideas were readily acceptable, while the latter found him to be combative and somewhat forceful. Lowenfeld's insistence on his own theories of art, which had been the consequence of his Viennese upbringing, conflicted with his assertion that the students should shed European influences in their work. The chapter addresses the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *Young Negro Art*, which featured Lowenfeld and some of his students, though their work was not particularly well-received. Finally, analyses of the artwork produced by Hampton students is performed in order to trace Lowenfeld's influence and philosophies in the political expressions of his students. It is learned that the imagery of the Holocaust permeated the works of Black students, so that they could express their own societal trauma through the visual cues of a Jewish experience.

The biographical nature of this study also intends to answer broader questions about the transference of ideas among Jewish refugees as they created new paths for themselves in a new racial system. In this scenario, Lowenfeld's career is examined in order to ascertain how the Jewish experience under Austro-German antisemitism influenced perceptions of art's creative power. The exclusion of Jews from youth hiking activities meant to bond Austrians together, for instance, turned Lowenfeld toward an insular Jewishness which represented an early minority consciousness. Understanding how Lowenfeld understood and transferred his European and Jewish trauma into a Southern and African American space reveals the connective capabilities of art. In presenting these salient figures and reconstructing their narrative, it is hoped that the dire history which Ralph J. Bunche had feared, in which "the scorned can also scorn" and the hated can also hate, may be eventually eradicated in the pursuit of racial equality.[29]

[29] Bunche, "Foreward," 8.

CHAPTER I:

"To Art Its Freedom": Jewish Art and Intellectualism in Vienna, 1900-1938

Viennese Movements: Liberalism and Nationalism

In early March of 1938, Viktor Lowenfeld returned home to find a note pinned to the front door of his streetside apartment. Just days earlier, his son John had celebrated his seventh birthday in the company of friends and classmates, with his wife Gretel striking away at the keys of their grand piano. The lives of the Lowenfeld family in Vienna were entirely reflective of the city's glittery, bourgeois reputation, alive with energy and culture, commonly immersed in treats of art and music. Viktor, a child prodigy in the violin and later as an adult, a graduate of some of Vienna's finest art academies, held an invincible devotion to creative expression. Gretel, once a physical education teacher at the Chajes Realgymnasium, a Zionist institution for Jewish youth, knew her husband first as a colleague when he shared his passion for creating art with his many students. After marrying in 1926, the couple initiated and managed a summer camp program for the school, allowing their young students opportunities to inspire their budding artistry with the scenic landscapes of Carinthia in the Eastern Alps.[30]

As dedicated educators, the Lowenfelds were entirely committed to serving Vienna's Jewish youth, who had been increasingly barred from attending Austria's state-run schools. During his frequent private strolls around Lake Wörthersee, the campground's most majestic feature, Viktor might have reflected on the unlikely success of his career as well as its promising potential. From an early life marked by financial difficulties, wartime starvation and antisemitic restrictions, here had emerged a highly admired innovator in the field of art education, whose brilliance and

[30] Viktor Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University (1958), Box 77, File 113, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

expertise would eventually attract the attention of such names like Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein and Helen Keller. In addition to teaching with Gretel at the Chajes Realgymnasium, he simultaneously held a position at the Hohe Warte Institute for the Blind, another Viennese institution for Jewish youths. His groundbreaking, albeit culturally controversial teaching tactics at this establishment earned him distinction within academic circles and led to the publishing deal for his first theoretical book, *The Nature of Creative Activity*.

It was still a work-in-progress in 1938, when Viktor's professional ambitions were halted and he and his family's safety were put into immediate jeopardy. Plain and instructive, the note on the door contained a few devastating words which Viktor, reflecting years later, could only faintly recall: "You [must] leave your apartment within three days. You are not allowed to take anything along with you but your immediate personal property, such as clothing."[31] Gretel's beautiful black piano would be left behind, as would the numerous paintings amassed over several years. Having to pack lightly meant Viktor would only be able to salvage a small portion of the work his students had done, art which was of value both for sentimental reasons and for the development of his writing. Three days under such duress was too much to withstand. Boarding a train just two days later, Viktor, Gretel and John parted from a Vienna that was no longer theirs.

In the decades prior to Lowenfeld's arrival in the city as a promising art student in 1921, Vienna had emerged as a contentious site of both urban modernism and political antisemitism. Already by the onset of the twentieth century, the city represented a bastion of excellence, harboring and molding the minds of those at the top of their respective fields. The great psychologist Sigmund Freud, literary genius Stefan Zweig, and the revolutionary painter Gustav

[31] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Autobiographical Lectures," in *The Autobiographical Lectures of Some Prominent Art Educators,* ed. Ralph Raunft (Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 2001), 8.

Klimt were just a few of the figures who found their bearings within Viennese spaces.[32] But Vienna, too, was where some political giants fostered their philosophical barbarism. Georg von Schönerer, an Austro-Hungarian politician and founder of the Deutschnationaler Verein (German-National Association), assisted in the mainstreaming of antisemitic nationalism, calling for the solidarity of the German race and the removal of the "Semitic principles" with which Jewish instructors taught.[33] Advocating for the separation of Jewish and Christian-Aryan educational facilities in 1888, Schönerer's proposals were grounded in pseudo-scientific racial theories that necessitated the protection of German blood.

Schönerer's attempts to increase antisemitic fervor within Austrian political discourse were aided by a political rival in Karl Lueger, founder of the Austrian Christian Social Party and mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910. The two men diverged on matters of religion, with Schönerer denouncing Catholicism as an internationalist threat to nationalism due to its inclusion of non-Germanic peoples. For his part, Lueger treated the nationalism which Schönerer so vehemently promoted with skepticism, and his antisemitism was not nearly as resentful, nor was it justified through racial theories. Instead of fully accepting its ideological premises, Lueger viewed antisemitism as a convenient political tool, "an excellent means of getting ahead in politics" in his own words.[34] Despite their differences in beliefs and motivations, Lueger and Schönerer exemplified antisemitism in fin-de-siecle Austria and its political flexibility. Their influence was felt by a young Adolf Hitler, who, while in Vienna, secured the "foundation for a philosophy" which would go on to shape his political career.[35] At the same time, the antisemitic platforms

[32] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980), chapters 3, 5.
[33] George Ritter von Schönerer, *A Fighter for Pan-Germany*, ed. Heinrich Schnee (Reichenberg: Sudetendeutscher Verlag Franz Kraus, 1943), pp. 126-27, 140-42, 175, 238-39. Translated by Jeremy King and Rachel Coll, 2001.
[34] Bruce Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 47.
[35] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 63.

espoused by Lueger and Schönerer resonated largely with right-wing opponents of Austrian liberalism. Originally liberals themselves, dissatisfaction with emerging liberal principles caused each man to break off, with Schönerer particularly piqued by the inadequate challenge to Slavic nationalism and social conditions which supposedly left his colleagues "bowing before the power of the Rothschilds," a sentiment which can only be understood as an antisemitic dog-whistle.[36] In essence, Schönerer partly rebuked Austrian liberalism as insufficiently nationalist for its apparent acceptance of what he considered non-Germanic elements like Slavs and Jews. According to the eminent British historian Peter Pulzer, Schönerer's goal of making "the Jewish question" a most urgent issue within the party fell flat, but his rhetoric did much to create the impression that liberalism was deeply entangled with Jewish politics. In rejecting Schönerer's antisemitic motions -- which had included the restriction of Jewish immigration -- as too extreme, the party essentially exposed itself as "soft" on antisemitism.[37]

Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna,* which remains the authoritative text on the cultural and political mixture which characterized Vienna in the new century, provides a useful model for understanding the city's mix of progressive and right-wing elements. His narrative moves through discernible stages, from the classical liberalism of the 1860s to the violent irrationalism of men like Schönerer in the 1880s-90s, and finally to the birth of a modernist high culture at the turn of the century.[38] Significant events changed the pace and tenor of political discourse, and helped transform Austrian liberals like Lueger and Schönerer into outspoken enemies of the party. These Austrian liberals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Schorske explained, viewed themselves as promoters of German intellection, German science and German humanism.

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[36] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna,* 128.
[37] Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Austria and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 157.
[38] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna,* xxvi-xxvii.

In contrast to the feudal aristocrats before them, Austro-German liberals would impress upon their subjects, the common people, the tenets of rational culture that would enable the creation of a stable, humanistic society.[39] Yet these goals were continuously challenged by national traumas and disagreements which prompted men like Lueger and Schönerer to form their own movements. The Austrian army's loss to Prussia in 1866, in combination with German unification of 1871 that had excluded and effectively isolated Austria, asserted Prussian dominion over Germanic peoples.[40] This devastated liberal pan-German nationalists like Schönerer, who strongly favored a "large German" solution to the question of unification, a solution in which all German speakers could be contained within one great state.[41] The reality left behind by the unification of 1871 was the opposite of pan-Germanist desires, as millions of Germans lived outside of the new German Empire's borders as non-subjects, including in Austria. Likewise, when Slavic calls for independence were not resisted strongly enough on the basis of German nationalism, liberals were branded as traitors to their nationalist origins.[42]

The economic crash of 1873 also fanned nationalist flames as men such as the famed pan-Germanist composer Richard Wagner took advantage of the opportunity to rail against modern capitalistic society, his conception of which had undoubtedly been defined by Jewish meddling, in favor of a romanticized "German medieval artisan society."[43] The stage was then set for the continued weakening of liberal principles as pan-Germanists and nationalists like Schönerer and Wagner were joined by others in freely expressing antisemitic ideas as integral to the problems of liberalism. If not racially or economically motivated, this sort of antisemitic anti-liberalism was

[39] Ibid, 118-122.
[40] Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History*, 160.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna*, 122.
[43] Ibid., 69.

also articulated as a cultural crisis, best exemplified in the politically convenient fear-mongering practised by Lueger. Writing of the press in 1891, Lueger attacked liberal newspapers as unequivocally Jewish, meant to be rejected with disdain by "all decent and intelligent people" who should be offended by the supposed anti-religious, unpatriotic, and subversive content.[44] According to historian Bruce Pauley, the "Jewish press" was viewed as responsible for leading the moral decay of German intellectual and spiritual life, as it promoted perverse sexual material and secularism. In literary criticism, the Jewish press was said to ignore the honorable achievements of Christian Germans in favor of Jewish authors and artists.[45] Liberal publications that were not intended for Jewish audiences were nonetheless considered Jewish in spirit and intellect, making principles like modernism and secularism inseparable from Jewishness.

These antisemitic leanings were part and parcel of an enduring Austro-German conservatism that invoked a *völkisch* ideology long before it became a staple of Nazism. In his classic text, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, George Mosse described the *völkisch* movement as an additional consequence of the 1871 unification, stemming from an anti-materialist bourgeoisie which lamented the lack of a spiritual unity.[46] Some semblance of physical unity might have been achieved in the redrawn borders of Germany, but it was through establishing a *völkisch* bond that the German people could be truly brought together in a meaningful way. Most *völkisch* thinkers denounced urban modernism, linking the vacuousness of "capitalistic" society to the regrettable decline of the German people.[47] Similarly, the movement represented a nearly religious union

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[44] Karl Lueger, *"I Decide Who Is A Jew!": The Papers of Karl Lueger*, ed. Richard Geehr (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 328.
[45] Bruce Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution,* 217.
[46] George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), chapter 1.
[47] Gabriele Weinberger and Dagmar Lorenz, *Insiders and Outsiders: Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 171.

which emphasized "blood and soil" earthiness in opposition to the harmful and unattractive din of urbanization, apparently promoted by Jews and other such societal undesirables.

In spite of these ominous developments, Schorske argues, liberal intellectuals who were not pulled into antisemitic nationalism, such as the aforementioned Freud, Zweig and Klimt, withdrew into an ideological space of what he called "the Garden," where artists and philosophers practiced a kind of individualism that would act as a new vehicle of personal liberation.[48] It was in the Garden that the idealized harmonious society, increasingly stripped away by rising nationalism, could be partly reclaimed as a part of the broader German project of *Bildung*. Through *Bildung*, liberal writers like Adalbert Stifter found a way to achieve "political freedom" regardless of societal realities.[49] *Bildung* made this possible because, as George Mosse has reasoned, it was "focused upon the individual and upon the power of his own reason," a vague, naive conception which enabled many to ignore the demands and truth of Austro-German political life.[50] Schorske noted the shift from the "characterological" focus of *Bildung* which Mosse described into one that was based more heavily in aesthetics.[51] This is what makes his metaphor of the Garden so striking, as it aptly paints of a picture of the liberal artist consumed by their pretty yards, their backs turned away from the ugliness which was beginning to fester in the city. But perhaps it could be said that Schorske's image is simplistic and unimaginative insofar as it ignores the possibility that aestheticism for these liberals was inherently political. Rather than viewing the Garden as an example of narcissistic passivity, the introversion practised by these artists and thinkers may more accurately be understood as acts of prolonged defiance to changing cultural norms.[52]

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[48] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna*, chapter six.
[49] Ibid, 282-293.
[50] Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 150.
[51] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna,* 305.
[52] In the decades since Schorske's publication, several scholars have challenged his specific characterization of Viennese liberals, including his description of their transition into their gardens. See, for example, Mary Gluck,

In the aftermath of the First World War, the intellectual scene in Austria continued to drastically transform itself as citizens questioned their roles in the nation as well as their identities. The collapse of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918 introduced new and crucial questions. The first concerned the Germanness of Austrians and whether or not they belonged to their own separate state, and the second, the nationality and cultural essence of Austria's Jews. While many Austrians accepted pan-Germanist ideals and longed to be a part of Germany's new Weimar Republic, the dilemma faced by Jews was complicated by fresh waves of antisemitism sparked by a devastating war. Zionism gained traction as a reasonable alternative to remaining in an increasingly hostile Austria, with many Zionists demanding that its government recognize Jews as a separate nationality.[53] Early Zionists, by the end of the war, articulated their desire for a homeland in Palestine as well as political autonomy for Jews remaining in Austria. Jewish opponents of Zionism lambasted its anti-liberal, pro-nationalist values, characterizing the movement as too quarrelsome and irritatingly "dogmatic," as famed author Stefan Zweig put it.[54] Like Zweig, assimilationist Jews looked toward harmony and compromise as the path to acceptance in Austria. If these conflicts could be translated into Schorske's framework, Jewish assimilationists were akin to those artists and philosophers who supposedly ignored political realities as they turned inward to the aesthetic safe haven that was the Garden.

Viktor Lowenfeld, arriving to Vienna in this very moment of Jewish identity crisis, understood the danger of aesthetics that were disengaged from political realities. Though he was just a boy as most of the aforementioned characters struggled with the collapse of classical liberalism and the rise of *völkisch* nationalism, his later ruminations on art, aided by the hindsight

"Rethinking Culture in Central Europe", in the *Austrian History Yearbook*, no. 28 (1997): 217-222. Gluck views the "aesthetic self-fashioning" of Viennese modernism as active political statements rather than apolitical self-isolation.

[53] Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution,* 76.

[54] Ibid., 222.

of having been forced to flee, are decisively attentive to the intertwining of politics and artistry. Even before antisemitic persecution forced him and his family to relocate, Lowenfeld's entrance into Viennese circles was compounded by his Zionist interests and sympathies, making politics a constant companion to his aesthetic and artistic practices. Traces of *Bildung* also appear in many of his professional writings, but are most often accompanied by references to national crises and the bridging of the individual to his or her society. In this way, Lowenfeld inherited aspects of liberalism in the formation of his artistic and education philosophies, but he avoided falling into the trap of the Garden as his approach carefully avoided isolating the individual and could never be considered apolitical. Lamenting the possibility that art expression's "extreme individualistic character" might "lose its communicative meaning," Lowenfeld instead advised the artist to consider collectivism.[55] The individual was important in modern art expression, as he argued throughout his educational career, but it must not become so detached from collective goals that its social and political power becomes lost. This is one example of an ideological disparity between those liberals in the Garden who, at least in Schorske's view, became lost in the weeds of aestheticism and Lowenfeld, a Jewish refugee whose personal losses to German nationalism prompted him to transform the way his intellectual predecessors conceived of modern art's purpose and power.

Lowenfeld's writings and practices firmly position him as a product of these kinds of political dialogues. Schorske's liberals in the Garden are best understood as Austro-German thinkers confined to pre-1918 Europe; afterwards, with the war initiating multiple crises of national and political identity, it was with their legacy that men like Lowenfeld, by then an adult, had to grapple. It is worth considering how Lowenfeld's particular identities as a modernist artist, a

[55] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Art and Society: A Dilemma," circa-1950, Box 1, Folder 56, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, Pennsylvania, pp. 1-6.

revolutionary educator and a Jewish intellectual meshed with the theories and principles of these liberals. In the above example, there is a slight discrepancy in approaches to art and politics, and in others too, Lowenfeld is a compelling case study as someone who consistently tested the assumptions of his contemporaries from whom he had gained much inspiration. When Lowenfeld settled in Vienna in 1921, he would have never expected to encounter names like Franz Cizek, who would become his pedagogical mentor, and even Sigmund Freud, who would soon personally request to meet him.[56] As he contended with the polarized politics of 1920s Vienna, his philosophical and artistic development led him into movements like Expressionism and the Viennese Secession, the inherent politics of which were hardly detached from societal issues of the era. Before Lowenfeld can be situated within discussions of these schools of thought and artistic expression, though, his early childhood and adolescence must be examined in order to best approximate how a Jewish boy from Linz became involved with the high drama of Vienna's artistic and political milieu in the immediate decades following the war.

Political Motivations in Viktor Lowenfeld's Early Life

Viktor Lowenfeld had never been a stranger to art appreciation or to the poetics of the aesthetics which made up his physical world. Born in Linz to a Jewish family, his early childhood had never strayed very far from principles maintaining that art and its production were essential to living a cultured, modern lifestyle. His summers were spent accompanying his mother through long strolls in the countryside, in full admiration of the natural landscape, its pastoral qualities

[56] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures,* 11. Despite each of these fascinating connections, and his own reputation and status as a prominent Austrian-American art educator, Lowenfeld has rarely been studied in a purely historical context. Most of the scholarship addressing his legacy only consider him as Viktor Lowenfeld, art theorist and educator, but not Viktor Lowenfeld, Austrian-Jewish refugee whose philosophies were crucially shaped by the dramatic scene that was turn-of-the-century Vienna. The subsequent sections in this chapter will treat Lowenfeld as such, recognizing the value in studying broad thematic cultural, political and artistic movements through the lens of a man who would have felt their impact more than most before settling in the foreign space that was the Hampton Institute in Virginia.

allowing him to develop sensitivity. Lowenfeld, despite his later brilliance in the production of abstract art, had never been dismissive of such romanticism which enabled him to experience life more intensely.[57] As early as four years old, he was something of a prodigy in the violin, eventually playing whole concerts and symphonies to standing ovations. Even in musical performance, Lowenfeld's approach was deeply emotive and expressive. He did not study or memorize pieces, but rather "played everything out of [the] mind," becoming lost in his free-flowing rhythms, steered not by instruction or structure but by an almost unconscious liberty.[58] Such a method earned him the privilege of playing in the presence of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, but conversely earned him the derogatory label of "gypsy," as he must have appeared too undisciplined and unpredictable to those who preferred structure in their art.[59] It was indeed the threat of structure that convinced Lowenfeld to drop his act as a child violinist entirely: even one of the best instructors in the country made his artistic expression "too serious" and "very exacting according to sheet music."[60]

Lowenfeld's early resistance to enforced order on music would later become a defining theme in how he conceptualized and taught visual art. It also indicated a real discrepancy in what Austrian national artistic expression was meant to be: was it to be done according to classicism, owing to historicism? Or could it be more "purely" produced, flowing from more abstract concepts of body and soul? In the second half of nineteenth century Austria, when large urban centers like Vienna especially fell into historicist aesthetics, the architectural construction project known as

[57] Ibid., 6.
[58] Lowenfeld earnestly pleaded with his audience not to look down upon romanticism, though his students might have come to understand him as a teacher of modern abstraction, and as redeemed from pretty and emotionalist aesthetics. He considered evolving from the romantic to the modern a reflection of maturity: one naturally encounters a "first love" with the romantic, and it is a fundamental stage in intellectual development.
[59] Ibid., 3.
[60] Ibid.

the Ringstrasse heavily implied a favoritism toward past styles like the neoclassical, the Hellenistic or the Gothic.[61] These historicist preferences for visual aesthetics suggested idealized visions of the past in which social organization was supposedly best practiced. Lowenfeld's rejection of the musical compositions of such revered pasts was akin to cultural rebellion, though he would not have classified his simple exploratory urges as such at the time.

It was this budding anti-historicism that led him away from the violin and into another form of expression, painting, beginning also around the age of ten. Though Lowenfeld never explicitly stated his motivation for picking up the paintbrush, it might have been those walks through lilly fields with his mother that prompted him to recreate what was visually beautiful. In fact, his earliest creations as a pre-teen were pen drawings of landscapes, amicable and pleasing enough to the common consumer that they could be easily sold. When his father was drafted into the army to fight in 1914, the Lowenfeld family fell into financial strife. His mother, having to raise four malnourished children with no helpful familial connections or savings, could only depend on beets for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Visual artwork would become Lowenfeld's contribution to alleviating his mother's pain. He sold his humble pen drawings for better art supplies, which had allowed him to learn the intricacies of painting oils and watercolors, works which could be traded for milk and potatoes throughout the war.[62] The great irony of such a survival story is in his father's return. Embittered by the result, and perhaps traumatized by the experience, his father took no pride in Viktor's dabbling with painting but rather saw it as a distraction and waste of finances.[63] For a while thereafter, his passion for painting might have been somewhat quelled if only due to the societal demands facing struggling Austrians at the time. In spite of its assistance in preventing

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[61] Elana Shapira, *Style and Seduction: Jewish Patrons, Architecture, and Design in Fin de Siecle Vienna* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2016), 64.
[62] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures,* 4.
[63] Ibid.

starvation, the general understanding among the Lowenfeld family was that art was not going to be a practical venue through which one could find stability.[64]

Though Lowenfeld's mother enjoyed and encouraged her son's work, patriarchal order had been restored in the household, and it might have been, in his father's estimation, that the sensitivity involved in the production of art was not conducive to the maturing of a young man. This question of the practicality of art expression in troubling financial times would reappear in Lowenfeld's years at the Hampton Institute, and though the problem in the context of African American survival in the Jim Crow South would be different, his experiences as an aspiring artist in wartime Austria allowed him a sympathetic perspective.

The war and its harsh aftermath had temporarily put Lowenfeld's relationship with his art on pause, but the new reality following a devastating loss of life all across Europe meant his political self would be born. By the end of the war, pacifism had become a talking point among those who had seen and lost too much and were determined to never experience such tragedy again. For Lowenfeld, fifteen years old in 1918, the most appealing strategies to prevent such war and devastation were be found in the Zionist youth movement. The interests for Lowenfeld were obvious. Not only did the movement have, in his words, "the character of rebuilding a country out of nothing" -- an appealing feature following a traumatic period of loss -- it also presented Lowenfeld with a way to come into his own identity as an Austrian Jew.[65] He found a place in the Austrian branch of the Blue-White movement, which had originated in Germany and placed an

[64] Lowenfeld expands on a story from his youth in which his father violently assails him for having engaged in the selling of his art, as "it was forbidden, strictly forbidden, that children should earn money without the permission of the parents or should use money without the permission of the parents." Understanding Lowenfeld's earliest experiences with painting as closely linked to instances of distress and pain might enable one to consider his partiality for abstract emotions.

[65] Ibid., 5.

emphasis on the establishment of a tight-knit Jewish community and advocated, to varying degrees, emigration to Palestine.[66]

Movements such as the Blue-White gradually spread out of awareness of and resistance to *völkisch* nationalism. The founding of the Blue-White in both Germany and Austria had been a reaction to the exclusion of Jews from youth hiking groups, whose goal was to develop camaraderie through nature. The rhetoric of harnessing nature which the Blue-White deployed, then, was not only reflective of desires to begin anew in Palestine, or to build a country out of presumed nothingness as Lowenfeld had characterized it, but also to parallel the models of those German youth groups that had been exclusionary. Lowenfeld's recollection of those land-based sentiments of the movement serve as testimony to this point in that his life after the war mirrored the goals of the Blue-White. Temporarily abandoning art, Lowenfeld fell into farming for a period of time, noting that the idealism behind "making soil produce something" from previously undeveloped lands filled a psychological need after years of near helplessness in the war.[67] It would appear from such a statement that Lowenfeld had not yet come to understand art in such a similar way: as a therapeutic exercise which healed and also affirmed one's identity. But while his experiences in Zionist youth movements did little to shape his art in this period, the enduring impression left on his concepts of education were undeniable.

By 1920, Lowenfeld himself had become a leader in broader Austrian youth movements, though his recollection of this detail is too vague to determine precisely which ones. Nonetheless, even as he moved into non-Jewish spaces, his closest associates remained Jews interested in consolidating Jewish culture. Lowenfeld developed a friendship with the famed Vienna-born

[66] Chanoch Rinott, "Major Trends in Jewish Youth Movements in Germany." *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 1974): 77-95.
[67] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 5.

philosopher Martin Buber, and together, Lowenfeld recalled, they took part in an experiment "to find out what youth would do on its own without disciplinary measures of adults."[68] This project would constitute Lowenfeld's first role as an educator, and though no records of its results exist, it might have been deemed successful if only because of its proposed dramatic sequel. In the follow-up experiment, Lowenfeld and Buber would be founders of a settlement, Wyckfohr, on a desolate island in the North Sea, in which a *Jugend Republik* (Youth Republic) would govern itself. As one might expect, the train here never left the station. These anecdotes of an adolescent Jewish activist fantasizing about a world without suppressive authority might seem silly -- and in fact, Lowenfeld's retelling of the events would imply he later thought the same way -- but the implicit ideologies being formed hold real meaning for Lowenfeld's political and educational beliefs.

For one, the proposals appeared to be inherently pacifistic, rebelling against misguided older generations that had invited so much devastation into the world with their warmongering. Secondly, it is here that Lowenfeld revealed a crucial element of his teaching philosophy when it comes to children, a theory which would later be incorporated into the teaching of all ages. In a theoretical *Lord of the Flies-esque* scenario, Lowenfeld demonstrated his belief in the importance of self-discovery, free of didactic confines which would have stifled the children's natural development. His island would have been a space for self-expression, for purity in the creation of something without oppressive structure. Wyckfohr was, in essence, an empty canvas on which children could have followed their own whims and desires -- much as he had as a young violinist -- becoming artists in the process.

His eventual advocacy for an education in the arts might then be directly tied back to this specific period in his life where his status as an Austrian-Jewish youth, struggling in the post-war

[68] Ibid.

years, led him to dream of a fairly radical form of social organization. If Wyckfohr represented a major revision to pedagogical norms, the aforementioned summer camps in Carinthia which Lowenfeld later arranged with his wife Gretel was a more moderate realization of this fantasy. Though his students were guided through these processes of self-affirmation by adults, a communal space for Jewish youths wherein they merged artistry together with nature was innately political. Lowenfeld, Gretel and their students fused *völkisch* concepts of connection to the surrounding landscape together with Zionist objectives of strengthening Jewish personhood and community. Much of the artwork which Lowenfeld encouraged these students to create were dramatic retellings of events in the Hebrew Bible, meaning their artistic identities would be deeply entwined with Jewish traditions.[69] Along with creating art, these summer camps engaged in scavenging expeditions so that Lowenfeld's students would learn how to exploit the landscape for basic survival, ideas perhaps inspired by the Blue-White movements which popped up in response to Austro-German hiking groups. Though Lowenfeld and Buber's plans for Wyckfohr never cemented, these activities were decisively political acts of Jewish community engagement, and in essence, represent resistance to the Garden which too many liberals fell into according to Schorske. They were not individualistic retreats, nor were they clearly apolitical and distracted by aesthetics. Lowenfeld's Zionism had emerged as an embrace of radically new political philosophies.

The Return to Art

Considering his legacy as an acclaimed religious philosopher, the potential impact Martin Buber might have had on Lowenfeld in their years together as youth leaders should not go unexplored. Of particular interest is Buber's rumination on Jewish artistry, written precisely in a year that he would have spent working with Lowenfeld. Lamenting on the lack of Jewish visual

[69] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 7.

artists, Buber first points to antisemitic stigmatizations as a root cause, as men such as Richard Wagner had "[denied] Jews the sensual capability" to produce great art; instead, in Wagner's estimation, the Jew was merely imitative.[70] But this antisemitic claim, which continued powerfully into the postwar years, only represented fuel for Zionists like Buber.[71] Later in his essay, he concludes that Jews would be wise to show off the creations of their artists so that a "consciously Jewish art public" may form with its own national characteristics.[72] Without suggesting that Buber alone motivated Lowenfeld's reinvestment in his art, one might note that these writings, which call for strong Jewish representation in visual art, coincide perfectly with the timeline of their relationship and Lowenfeld's investment in establishing Hebraic connections in the art of his students in Carinthia.

The visibility of Jewish artistry, though, was hardly Buber's only concern, as he also considered artistic production essential to the very creation of Jewish nationhood. At the Fifth Zionist Congress held in 1901, Buber articulated in his address the need for Jews to "become conscious of themselves" by depending on art production. Jewish art was valuable in instilling moral and spiritual principles in Jewish individuals so that they could become "a capable and respected human resource for Palestine."[73] Art, in Buber's thinking, was practical in the project of Jewish nationalism and akin to emancipation in that it would allow a clarity of self otherwise obscured by the dominant society. For Buber, it was crucial that Zionists "no longer translate the overflowing movement of our soul into isolated intellectualism," but instead into a productive

[70] Martin Buber, *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 100.
[71] It is worth noting that in earlier publications, Buber had blamed the dearth of Jewish artists on inherited culture. The Jews of the Desert, he had argued, were an aural culture; that they produced few great visual artists was only natural. His view necessarily changed in the wake of increased antisemitism and, perhaps, interactions with a painter in Lowenfeld himself.
[72] Ibid., 105.
[73] Ibid., 47-8.

activity. Buber's words here were felt strongly at the Zionist Congress, with transcriptive notes suggesting frequent and enthusiastic applause, so it is not unlikely his sentiments remained intact by the time he met Lowenfeld, a Jewish artist with whom his ideas would especially resonate.

Just as Lowenfeld's experiences with Zionist youth movements contributed to his development as an art educator, it is possible his specific interactions with Buber also inspired him to reconnect with art in the immediate period after the war. Other cultural factors affecting Jews his age would have also cemented his commitment to an artistic identity that was reliably Jewish. In *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*, historian Michael Brenner correlates the burst in Jewish literary, scholarly and artistic presence with the search for authentic cultural distinctiveness. These movements enabled a shift from religious Judaism to a secular culture that was still recognizably Jewish, and it is likely Lowenfeld fell into these broad Austro-German cultural trends. Brenner further interprets this "Jewish renaissance," a term coined by Buber, as evidence of the Jewish quest for community through which their shared heritage could be identified and preserved.[74] To do so was reasonable, as even after Jews bled for their nations in the war, antisemitic forces prevented their full immersion with the predominant culture. Lowenfeld, perhaps thinking of his father's own service, would have fully experienced this sense of detachment from Austrian culture and the need for one of his own. Art became the logical method through which this expression of cultural connectedness could be achieved.

Following his adolescent years in the youth movements, Lowenfeld enrolled as a psychology and art history student at the University of Vienna. As part of his activism and travels, Lowenfeld was not a stranger to the city, but if he held in his head an image of a splendid urban landscape, his living conditions would have quickly grounded such expectations. As a poor

[74] Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 24.

student, he could only afford to live on the outskirts of the city, in the barracks left over from the war. Yet the discomfort had been secondary to his quick evolution as an artist and thinker. After enrolling in the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, "a kind of Vienna Bauhaus," Lowenfeld had the opportunity to study under one of the most prominent Viennese artists of the time, Franz Cizek, whose theories on art education would help shape his own.[75] Cizek had rejected the teaching of art to children based on an imitative model, in which the child would observe an adult's aesthetics and attempt to reproduce it.[76] Later in his life, as part of his lectures, Lowenfeld would adapt and contextualize Cizek's problem of imitation in ways that would relate to his own life. The "sameness of expression" that comes about in children's imitation of art, Lowenfeld always argued, was fundamentally "fascist": it discouraged the individual, and psychologically trained the child to aspire for unity.[77] In this case, art production was closely integrated with the making of a politically responsible citizen, just as it was deeply entwined with the establishment of a distinctly Jewish culture.[78]

If Cizek resented imitative art teaching, his preference should be obvious: free creative activity. Children held particular power in the ability to express freely, without inhibitions but with pure instincts. The child was, essentially, a primitive artist, not yet tainted by the historicist social order of the time. Lowenfeld's vision for the island of Wyckfohr, which predated his meeting with Cizek, was also entirely anti-imitative in its recommendation for fresh societal structures liberated from standard patterns of behavior to follow. These ideas can be contextualized into the broader artistic movement in Vienna with which Cizek strongly identified: the Viennese Secession,

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[75] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures,* 6.
[76] Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna,* 327.
[77] John A. Michael, ed., *The Lowenfeld Lectures: Viktor Lowenfeld on Art Education and Therapy* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), 41.
[78] These transcribed lectures come from Lowenfeld's art education classes at The Pennsylvania State University in 1958. In several of his lectures, he relates concepts of learning art to one's political development as a world citizen.

consisting of an anti-historicist segment of society which wanted to shed the outdated confines of the past in favor of aesthetics that more accurately reflected the birth of a modern, urban space.[79] Its architects and artists pushed forth no distinctive style, instead celebrating the plurality of approaches that could come about through more abstract expression.

Lowenfeld, in considering his railings against the dangers of sameness and of imitation, could be placed firmly within this Secessionist camp. In his essay written circa-1950, "Art and Society: A Dilemma," Lowenfeld articulates the absurdity of a historicist society: "If later generations would look at the interchanging effect between our culture of today and its bearers ... they might discover that educators, after having taught progressive methods of free expression in the sciences, the language arts, or other fields of learning, go home and relax in a home environment of the former century."[80] This logical discrepancy, Lowenfeld argued, was a disservice to the advancement of modern culture and art. It is worth noting that Lowenfeld's anti-historicist leanings did not necessarily contradict his Zionist allegiance, though some scholarship has positioned the two doctrines as incompatible. David N. Myers, in *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*, for instance, characterizes Weimar-era Zionism as the content of "base materialism" which primarily sought "to return the Jewish people to history." In this interpretation, Zionism's project of restoring Jewish heritage and history looks backward rather than forward, the exact practice which Lowenfeld lambasted as illogical. But Myers does not account for the other dimensions of this Zionism which men like Lowenfeld believed in, including its objectives of renewing Jewish culture and spreading its visibility. When

[79] Klaus H. Carl and Victoria Charles, *The Viennese Secession* (New York: Parkstone Press International, 2011), 65.
[80] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Art and Society: A Dilemma," 1.

Lowenfeld instructed his summer camp students to visually reconstruct narratives of Jewish history, his intention was not to enshrine the past but rather to affirm Jewish identity.

When detached from such goals of heritage affirmation, Lowenfeld viewed historicism as detrimental to the very process of learning, for if one were to teach "experiencing by living" or "integrated live experience," this approach would have been inevitably hampered by the irony of studying modern art in buildings that represented colonial pasts.[81] He takes the historicist partiality to styles of the past to mean a lack of confidence in the present society, perhaps a harbinger for dangerous political rhetoric which bemoans the present state and continuously and symbolically longs for the past.[82] Modernist architecture in educational institutions, at the very least, would mirror the environment to which the youth knows and actively experiences. To enforce upon them relics of the past is not only nonsensical, but potentially insensitive. Lowenfeld's passionate disdain for historicist architecture here will become relevant once again when he moves into the architectural spaces of the Hampton Institute, its building aesthetics representing an affront to the African American students who learn inside them. As a scholar who had frequently entered the permanent exhibition space of Vienna's Secessionist school, Lowenfeld would have understood the implications of the motto engraved on its exterior. "To each age its art, to every art its freedom," the sleek, modernist building proclaimed, demanding artistry that was unburdened by historicism and reflective of its contemporary social reality.[83]

While Lowenfeld was demonstrably Secessionist and anti-historicist in the Viennese tradition, he also identified himself as having engaged extensively in the Expressionism developed

[81] Ibid., 5.

[82] "Art and Society: A Dilemma" is another essay written after Lowenfeld's emigration to the United States, but with the memory of the Holocaust lingering in his mind. It might be reasonable to assume he links historicist architecture to the kinds of anti-modernism which allowed fascism to flourish.

[83] Anna Harwell Celenza, "Music and the Vienna Secession: 1897-1902," *Music in Art* 29, no. 1/2 (2004): 203-12.

across the border in Germany, through which "inward feelings [could] come out as a very important part of [one's] life."[84] In Expressionist art, defined simplistically, emotionalism distorts figures and landscapes as a means of suggesting the subjective lives of those depicted.[85] A far cry from the aesthetically pleasing pastoral watercolors which Lowenfeld had sold in his youth, this new art style allowed him to dive further into modern abstraction, continuing his resistance to historicist standards. Lowenfeld categorized his Expressionism as a process in "self-realization," making it a highly personal endeavor, another reaction against the sameness of expression that had characterized art in undemocratic spaces.[86] But in this form of artistic expression, what had made those pretty but bland watercolors so profitable -- their uncontroversial nature -- had entirely disappeared in exchange for an aesthetic that could not be so easily understood or appreciated by members of the public. As Lowenfeld cemented his artistic identity, others turned to his style as evidence of cultural degradation, the ideal tool for whipping up antisemitic resentment. Before this process led to the rise of Nazism and the eviction of Lowenfeld and his family from their home, however, his educational associations proved to be almost as problematic.

Dangerous Interests in the Blind and "Degenerate Art"

As an art student, Lowenfeld was introduced to new methods for finding a language of expression. Immersing himself in philosophical material, he came to learn "visual experiences" as "illusions," the truest sense art belonging instead to touch. What one could touch in the daytime would not change if felt during the evening; visually, there is an obvious difference in perspective.[87] Spending an evening in the Viennese Woods, Lowenfeld tested this theory,

[84] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 8.
[85] Lisa M. Anderson, *German Expressionism and the Messianism of a Generation* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 31-53.
[86] Viktor Lowenfeld, "General Steps in Art Education Therapy," n.d., Box 1, Folder 45, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, pp. 1-11.
[87] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 6.

contemplating in darkness his levels of sensitivity to his surroundings. Later on, he felt compelled to apply for a teaching position at the Hohe Warte Institution for the Blind in 1926, armed with the theory that "every human is born with a creative spirit," possessing a basic drive for artistry.[88] Suddenly, all of his previous practices and ideas about the importance of unstructured, free-flowing, anti-imitative art production could be completely validated through the act of teaching visual art to the blind community. And in doing so successfully, he would be performing a public good, as the therapeutic benefits of making art could increase the confidence, independence and personal satisfaction felt by an otherwise excluded and marginalized group.[89]

Though his intentions were noble, resistance was easy to come by from those who balked at the suggestion that the blind could produce worthwhile art. Speaking to Dr. Burkle, then the Director of the Institution for the Blind, Lowenfeld laid out his case: "It occurred to me that blind people, because they are deprived of the sense of sight, could probably create the purest three-dimensional sculptures. Those people who have a refined sensibility toward tactile experiences should be able to produce the best sculptures or at least the purest three-dimensional sculptures." Dr. Burkle offered a stern and immediate repudiation: "Young man, if you would know that blind people cannot have simultaneous images, you would also know that they cannot create because one of the assumptions for any creation or creative activity is that we have an imagination in which symbols can be organized."[90] Burkle could not conceive of artistry stemming from inner expression, the kind that could be constructed through the stirrings of the artist's soul as he or she

[88] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Art Education for the Handicapped," n.d., Box 1, Folder 53, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, 1.
[89] It is not this paper's suggestion that Lowenfeld was astoundingly progressive for his time. Although his idea to provide an artistic outlet for the blind was a testimony to his generosity, he still displayed language that would make any modern reader blush, referring to one of his blind pupils as a "mongoloid imbecile." The particulars of Lowenfeld's own potential prejudices as societally conditioned will be further discussed in subsequent chapters.
[90] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 7.

interacts with every basic human sense. Instead, he and the culture to which he belonged accepted what historian Martin Jay has described as an ocularcentric worldview, privileging sight over other sensations such as touching, hearing, and smelling. Jay traces how Western philosophers came to understand visual experience as "illusory" in that it relied too heavily on "external images" of a social world rather than the private reality of the inner self.[91] Writing later on the consequences of including multiple senses in the production of art, Lowenfeld understood blindfolding as a helpful technique in that it could allow artists an "increase in the complexity of expression," liberating them from the confines of a culture which placed too much emphasis on the visual.[92]

Undeterred by his initial critics, Lowenfeld resorted to underhanded tactics to prove his theory correct. With bins of stolen clay in hand, he approached the blind himself with the request that they attempt to make art for him. Days later, Lowenfeld sat down for another meeting with Dr. Burkle, now with physical evidence -- a series of masks, beautifully sculpted -- in tow. The response had turned from one of disbelief to disgust. "Young man," said Dr. Burkle, "I prohibit you from coming into this institution from now on. This can be the downfall of the education of the blind if it is known. Blind people will think they can become sculptors, artists. This is misleading! This is a crime!"[93] And so he departed, unable to convince the man that the only crime committed was the stubborn exclusion of people from a process from which every human being could benefit. Dr. Burkle's unwillingness to imagine the blind engaging in art production also suggested a widespread societal conception of art as imitative, not something emotionally felt and performed. Lowenfeld had once again been repudiated for disregarding structure in the arts, a

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[91] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 197.
[92] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Vom Entstehen der Plastiken," 1934, Box 1, Folder 9, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, pp. 1-9. Translated from German.
[93] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 9.

theme he knew well since childhood. Reflecting later, Lowenfeld identified the outcomes of these initial experiments with the blind as clearly having exemplified Expressionism: it revealed their intuitive thoughts and allowed them to construct and appreciate their pasts, much in the same way his engagement with art as a Zionist enabled a renewal of Jewish heritage and spirit.[94]

This changed with the arrival of a new director at the institution, Dr. Siegfried Altmann. The ban on Lowenfeld was lifted, and he taught the blind until his forced emigration in 1938. His successful experimentation even attracted the attention of Sigmund Freud, who requested to visit and oversee some of the work being produced. That the artistry of the blind commanded psychological interests is unsurprising, as the cult of the imitative, of the historicist model was so pervasive in twentieth-century Vienna, one could hardly conceive of how the blind might perform such acts of self-expression. For Lowenfeld, the mystery was hardly all that puzzling, as man's ability to create is what distinguished him from the animal.[95] At the time of his meeting with Lowenfeld, Freud had been revising his seminal work *Totem and Taboo,* in which he lauded artistic production as akin to magic. For Freud, art was the means of transference of mental forces which made it possible for man to express, and its narcissistic element was further proof of the human's need for self-preservation.[96] Lowenfeld understood art similarly as a survival tactic. Later describing a deaf-blind student, he noted she "was so emotionally disturbed she could make no friends, couldn't learn to talk, and was extremely nervous. Through giving her clay to mold, she gradually related herself to her surroundings." Learning to speak through her own body, which Freud might have characterized as a transition of libidinal energy into creative expression, she

[94] Viktor Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University, 1958, Box 77, File 122, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.
[95] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Therapeutic Aspects of Art Education," n.d., Box 1, Folder 48, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library State College, PA, 2.
[96] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2003), chapter 3.

eventually played with other children and her disposition turned from distraught to cheerful. Sharing with Freud the language of magic, Lowenfeld remembered this development as a "miracle" only accomplished through the aid of artistic production.[97] It is unknowable if Lowenfeld and Freud, during their encounter, discussed art in precisely these terms, but at the very least it is clear the two operated under similar theories of psychology as it can be related to art.

With the advent of Nazism in Europe, though, Lowenfeld and his students would soon discover that the preservation of the self through art meant little in the face of oppressive societal forces. The "handicapped," in the views of the rising Nazi Party, were examples of "superfluous life," and threats to the purity of the Aryan race.[98] They were wastes who could perform no discernible good for society, and so, as Lowenfeld would sadly recall, "the whole Institution for the Blind was converted into a Nazi stronghold … and all blind individuals went into the gas chambers -- all of them."[99] Lowenfeld himself, of course, was another natural enemy to the rising Third Reich: Jewish, a modernist artist whose creative principles clearly opposed fascist tenets, and an ally and advocate for superfluous life. The collection that he amassed, containing some works of he and his blind students, would eventually be destroyed, as was common practice for the "anti-art" of the age.[100]

The Expressionism which Lowenfeld engaged in was tantamount to what the Nazis had labelled Degenerate Art, an affront to aesthetic and moral decency, and a polar opposite of the realistic, classical styles they had adopted. Nazi architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg called all modernist works "artificial" and "shabby," and its proliferation prior to the Nazi era of redemption

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[97] Viktor Lowenfeld, *Creative and Mental Growth* (New York and London: Macmillan Publishing, 1949), 469.
[98] Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 13.
[99] Lowenfeld, *Autobiographical Lectures*, 12.
[100] Ibid.

meant the wrong people had too much influence in the art world.[101] Jewishness was inextricable to this concept: it was, in part, the "Jewish spirit" which had infected and stunted so much of Austro-German culture's intellectual development, including its artistic output. Also destructive to these nationalist objectives was the increasing presence of Black artistry in Austro-German spaces, assumed by many antisemites to be a product of Jewish internationalist interests. Though the bastardization of the German race through interracial relations was a substantial fear, the cultural threat posed by jazz was also characterized as a symptom of moral decay and sexual looseness and therefore just as threatening. Eugenicist Fritz Lenze degraded Black artistry, much like Jewish creativity, as essentially imitative, for "the Negro is not particularly intelligent … and above all he is devoid of the power of mental creation, is poor in imagination, so that he has not developed any original art and has no elaborate folk myths."[102] Lowenfeld, as someone so heavily invested in all that modern art had to offer, was aware of Black creative abilities and therefore espoused an entirely different view.

Though his perspective was transformed by his years at the Hampton Institute, he claimed to have always understood African art as "the world of symbols and subjective processes in which the ego is placed in value relationship to his environment. It is the world of expressionism."[103] As Expressionism was, in his understanding, an essential facet of Black art, claims which denigrated Black creativity as inauthentic or unoriginal could not be valid. He appreciated African art as a staple of modernism, and doing so inspired him to move African art from the Archaeological

[101] Paul Schultze-Naumburg and Walter Gropius, "Who is Right? Traditional Architecture or Building in New Forms," *German History in Documents and Images,* vol. 6, 1926, n.p.
[102] Fritz Lenze quoted in Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 85.
[103] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression in America," 1945, Box 19, Folder 12, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, 7.

Center in Vienna to an art museum where he curated an exhibit.[104] Such a move was a radical acceptance of Black artistry as genuine cultural products worth examining, if not admiring. In an archaeological context, African art was merely a collection of objects specific to a place or culture, but in an artistic venue, it was valued as intellectually stimulating material. Each of these acceptances of African modernity and aesthetics represented a refusal to acquiesce to Austro-German projects of white unification, which was attempted through the vilification of Black skin and the proliferation of African caricatures.[105]

Lowenfeld, naturally, with his Jewishness, his embrace of modernism and his sympathies for other marginalized groups, was a problematic element in Viennese society after the *Anschluss* of March 1938. Consequently, he, Gretel and John had no choice but to seek temporary refuge in England, their future uncertain and their language proving to be an immediate barrier. While on the train, departing for his new life, Lowenfeld scanned the Austrian landscape for what was almost the last time. Gone were the memories of peaceful afternoons in the grass with his mother, soaking in his bits of inspiration. Now, as he bitterly chucked his Austrian coins out of the train's window, all he could see was the terrible march of totalitarianism.

[104] Viktor Lowenfeld, "The History of Art Education," n.d., Box 1, Folder 60, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, n.p.
[105] Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 24.

CHAPTER II:

"The Rescue of Learning": Viktor Lowenfeld, Refugee in the American South, 1938-1946

Escaping *Anschluss*: Viktor Lowenfeld's Emigration

As a result of his innovative pedagogical practices with the blind, Viktor Lowenfeld's career prior to the advent of Nazism was primed for international interest and acclaim. His insistence in proving the artistic merit of his blind pupils, against the vehement disbelief of less imaginative contemporaries, turned him into a critical voice worth amplifying. Lowenfeld's intellectual maturation in Vienna, his unwavering commitment to its Jewish community, and his emergence as a compassionate proponent of the disadvantaged made him a natural fit for larger intellectual discussions on the societal implications of contemporary art. His thinking was not only unorthodox, but controversial and challenging to worldwide perceptions of mankind's artistic capacities. Consequently, he had foreign contacts to rely on when the moment of forced emigration came upon the Lowenfeld family. Herbert Read, an influential art historian and curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum, arranged for his arrival in London following the prompt exit from Austria in March of 1938. With Read as an ally, Lowenfeld initiated the writing of his first major work, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, and practiced his English in preparation for a new life that would inevitably preclude any sort of opportunities in Austrian or German spaces for the foreseeable future.[106]

With few job prospects in England, and members of Viktor's family looking to the United States for a new home, the Lowenfelds moved overseas to New York in December of 1938. While Lowenfeld's growing reputation throughout Europe had secured him British connections, in America, he had no such immediate privileges. Instead, he and his family boarded in dormitory-

[106] Viktor Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University, 1958, Box 77, File 123, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

style sleeping quarters for refugees, a philanthropic project courtesy of Rabbi Stephen Wise, then president of the American Jewish Congress (AJC).[107] Lowenfeld later remarked on the difficulties of beginning a new life in the middle of New York City, where he struggled in nearly every aspect of integration. "The wall of languages is just tremendous, and [one has] no idea what a barrier it is," he recalled of his troubles speaking English.[108] Without a personal supporter like Read, and no longer confined to an indoor writing space -- but instead, walking the streets daily in search of work -- the linguistic challenges of New York were entirely daunting compared to those of London. "I was just going around," said Lowenfeld, "I had not a penny, I had simply nothing. And it was difficult to find contact. I cannot exaggerate, but I had an inflammation of the muscles. My tendons were swollen because I couldn't any longer carry all these [briefcases] … I walked blocks and blocks and blocks until I could scarcely walk."[109][110] Among the materials he carried in his briefcases were numerous portfolios, unpublished writings and letters of recommendations from European friends, but Lowenfeld's penniless situation prevented him from regularly using all means of public transport. The physicality of his ordeal as a Jewish refugee must not be understated, lest historiographical perceptions of such refugee struggle be misremembered as physically uncomplicated. Though Lowenfeld and others like him escaped the worst of Nazi atrocities, their lives in the United States were hardly direct paths to comfort and prosperity. European recommendations meant little to most American employers, especially when Lowenfeld's fatigued state limited his capabilities to conduct exhaustive searches throughout the city.

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] All of Lowenfeld's recorded autobiographical lectures are exclusively in audio format, meaning some of his apparent physical gestures may be imprecisely interpreted. In this case, Lowenfeld earlier references having had briefcases full of his papers and publications.

These moments of hardship underline the cultural displacement felt by Lowenfeld, detached linguistically from his surroundings and living in a state of anxious uncertainty regarding his future. Given this vulnerability, it is worthwhile to note the societal conditions which contributed to his feelings of both unease and relief as a Jewish refugee. Just as the transition from liberalism into nationalism impacted Lowenfeld's artistic and personal philosophies in Vienna, the American political scene contributed to his identity as an artist in a new location. Lowenfeld's escape from Nazism to a nation characterized by entirely different racial ideologies and structures did not weaken his association with his Jewishness; rather, it affirmed his sentimental connection, allowing his eventual work to reflect the underpinnings of *Bildung* which had influenced his earlier artistic expressions. This chapter analyzes the factors which allowed Lowenfeld to maintain this attachment, even in successive moments of relative integration with America's white society. Throughout his career advancements, Lowenfeld also continued to present a political purpose through his teaching, encouraging the artist's individualism in order to prevent her or him from "playing ostrich" or becoming oblivious to the types of intolerance which forced his own emigration.[111] This motivation to promote political consciousness in art, often with activistic flair, stemmed from both his Viennese upbringing and his earliest days as a Jewish refugee in despair.

Without the American Jewish Congress' refugee housing project, the Lowenfelds would have been homeless. Lowenfeld's refugee narrative therefore began with a profound example of community solidarity, and of attentiveness to a crisis concerning world Jewry. Given his passion for Zionist causes, it is reasonable to assume that Lowenfeld viewed a man like Rabbi Wise with great reverence. For Jewish refugees like Lowenfeld fleeing for their lives, Wise's name "became

[111] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Art and Society: A Dilemma," 6.

a focus of hope" in the words of his biographer, Melvin Urofsky.[112] His diligence and strong rhetoric promoting Jewish unity and protection meant a great deal during a time when the larger American populace rejected such peoples. Lowenfeld's arrival in December 1938, just a month after the internationally publicized November pogrom, or *Kristallnacht*, meant his period of adaptation came at a time when sympathy for the Jewish plight might have been expected. The reality was not so: in November 1938, a Gallup poll reported that "four out of five Americans did not want to let in more immigrants" and public support for specifically Jewish newcomers was strikingly low.[113] In light of American antisemitism, Wise's strength in continuously demanding Jewish protection would have compelled and resonated with a desperate Lowenfeld.

Wise's role as a Jewish activist in an American landscape is significant to Lowenfeld's development as a politically cognizant refugee.[114] Just as Austrian and German thinkers moved Lowenfeld toward certain philosophies in art and education, the particular strain of civil rights activism which defined Wise's public persona impacted the man learning to transition his specifically Viennese political ideas into American spaces. Through the AJC, writes Urofsky, Wise "fought the Nazis, battled for more liberal immigration laws, and in the 1940s committed American Jewry to the civil rights struggle," thus showing his admirers what impassioned campaigning rooted in group identity looked like. Lowenfeld's more immediate and pressing concerns meant concepts of this nature were not yet relevant, but these calls for group

[112] Melvin Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke For Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 302.
[113] Ibid., 303.
[114] On the use of the term *refugee* rather than *immigrant*: it is impossible to ascertain, from Lowenfeld's papers, whether he initially characterized his stay in the United States as a temporary or permanent solution. While the dangers of the Nazi Party were evidently understood by Lowenfeld and others who fled, few could have anticipated the totality and devastation of the Holocaust and might have viewed emigration as a temporary means of relief from political unrest.

consciousness, solidarity and defense would have influenced his later political discourse regarding African Americans at the Hampton Institute.

Before finding himself there in Virginia, Lowenfeld required a fortuitous opportunity, and he found it one day on 59th Street, having been drawn, quite characteristically, to an art exhibit of children's drawings in association with the Museum of Modern Art.[115] Speaking to a secretary, Alma Latour, Lowenfeld introduced himself and plucked from his briefcase a copy of his manuscript, *The Nature of Creative Activity*. From the testimony of his students, colleagues and recorded lectures, it is not difficult to imagine how Lowenfeld exhibited a peculiar charm in this chance encounter. His accent was thick and Austrian, but softened by a kind tone and demeanor. He was tall, but not imposingly so, perhaps because of his lanky posture. Decades after his meeting with Latour, his recorded ruminations on art are often riddled with awkward stammers, yet his passion and intelligence are indisputable. Latour must have agreed. As Lowenfeld recalled, "she telephoned to the Fieldston School, to Victor d'Amico. And he came in and looked at [the manuscript], and, well, he said he would like to make me acquainted with other people."[116] Victor d'Amico, a rising leader in art education and freshly appointed the head of the educational program at MoMA, went on to become one of Lowenfeld's first professional acquaintances in the United States.[117]

In an instant, the brilliant reputation Lowenfeld had built for himself overseas had seemed to resurrect itself as these figures quickly discovered his worth. First, he was invited to speak on art pedagogy at Columbia University, where he attracted the attention of a Harvard University

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[115] Viktor Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University, 1958, Box 77, File 123, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.
[116] Ibid. The historically prominent Ethical Culture Fieldston School, where Victor d'Amico was then the head of the art department.
[117] Victor D'Amico, "Autobiographical Lectures," in *The Autobiographical Lectures of Some Prominent Art Educators*, ed. Ralph Raunft (Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 2001), 52.

psychologist, Gordon Allport, with whom he was able to converse in German. For his skilled experiences working with the blind, Lowenfeld was appointed to a temporary research position with the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts from February to June 1939.[118] The opportunity was appropriate given his expertise in educating blind children, a cause which had also captivated his brother, psychologist Berthold Lowenfeld who had emigrated to the United States slightly earlier. Berthold was independently making his own impressive associates, including the most famous graduate of the Perkins School, Helen Keller, with whom Viktor had also corresponded. Berthold's recollection of such a relationship demonstrates an instance of relief he and his brother felt while merging into a new intellectual milieu where neither risked immediate denunciation because of their Jewishness. Upon being introduced to Keller, he explained, "she embraced and kissed me and I can still hear her voice: 'I am so happy you could escape!' ... I [was] deeply touched by this overflow of goodwill, so radically in contrast to our recent experiences in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe."[119]

Keller was living proof of Viktor's controversial theories pertaining to a person's innate creative capacities, and as Berthold articulated, her accomplishments helped to dismantle the supposed superiority of sight given she was "confined to touch, smell and taste."[120] In the intellectual circle revolving around the Perkins School, Lowenfeld was able to find both sympathy and validation for his most controversial theories. It even offered him his first political platform in the United States, as he volunteered to conduct a student panel on democracy and "what life would

[118] Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University.
[119] Berthold Lowenfeld, "Helen Keller: A Remembrance" in *Visual Impairment and Blindness*, May 1980, Box 67, Folder 11, Berthold Lowenfeld Papers, American Foundation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archives, Digitized Collection, New York, NY, 2.
[120] Ibid.

be like for youth in a European country today."[121] The school was a beacon of hope, a perfect solution to his immigration troubles, and with enough time, Lowenfeld figured, his temporary position would be made permanent. When June came, however, an alternative opportunity presented itself. Lowenfeld recounted, "I was called into Allport's office and asked if I would be interested in just talking with the President of Hampton Institute. They wanted to start an art department. Would I be interested in directing an art department? I could scarcely speak English!"[122]

The linguistic challenge posed a considerable problem, as did the prospect of uprooting once again. To move from Vienna to New York to Massachusetts was daunting enough for refugees seeking stability, and the American South might have seemed entirely foreign in their imaginations. Thinking over the decision, though, Lowenfeld found himself most compelled by the chance to spread his art education to an entirely new cultural space. "I would be most fascinated in doing this in a Negro institution," he reasoned. Remembering the excitement of a fresh pedagogical task, Lowenfeld recalled, "that was a tremendous feeling for me -- an introduction to some entirely new phase. It dawned on me that this was like the Institution for the Blind. Nothing had been done there [at Hampton]. I said, 'of course, this is one of the most wonderful challenges I could think of.'"[123] In comparing the opportunity to pioneer an art program at the all-black Hampton to his work at the Institute for the Blind, Lowenfeld drew his own connections between the two communities of marginalized people.

His previous experiments with the blind entailed therapeutic artistry through which the artists could experience something resembling cathartic liberation. As he had acknowledged, art's

[121] "The Lantern", student newspaper publication, Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, Dec. 1935 - Mar. 1951, Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation, Digital Archives, n.p.
[122] Lowenfeld, Audio of recorded lecture at Pennsylvania State University.
[123] Ibid.

capacity for individual expression was a means of resisting an oppressive society's tendency to promote the kind of sameness that left certain groups vulnerable. By agreeing to extend this project and his ideologies to Hampton, Lowenfeld showed an early awareness of American social dynamics marked by anti-Blackness, and an inclination to continue the tenets of expressionism which he found to be so vital to the maintenance of free society. The "sameness of expression" which Lowenfeld had always linked to fascism through its "regimentation of stereotypes" would have been inevitably prevalent in an institution like Hampton where creative expression had not yet emerged as a means of individual and group liberation.[124]

As he transitioned into his role at the Hampton Institute, Lowenfeld brought forward a fresh perspective entirely distinct from those of his white colleagues. It was a perspective rooted in specifically Austrian politics and art, and most significantly in racialized persecution. These connectors between Lowenfeld's status as a Jewish refugee and Black Southerners, both targeted for their race, made their shared space uniquely susceptible to the production of politically minded artwork which protested societal hierarchies and challenged stereotypes. Yet the similarities between Lowenfeld and his students could only go so far, as their interactions, his ideas and Hampton's mission reveal. Near the end of Lowenfeld's research appointment at the Perkins School, Dr. Arthur Howe, the white president of the Hampton Institute from 1930 to 1940, wrote to Allport with a hiring inquiry.

The letter does much to reveal the demographics and intellectual climate of the institution's student and faculty community, the first potential source of disconnection for Lowenfeld who would have been one of the few non-Christians. "We have over a thousand Negro students, largely from the South," he explained, "The staff is biracial -- about 50% white and 50% Negro. Although

[124] John A. Michael, ed., *The Lowenfeld Lectures: Viktor Lowenfeld on Art Education and Therapy*, 40.

we are an undenominational institution, we have a strong Protestant background and believe in the closest relationship of education and religion. I suppose in some ways we are a little more conservative than the average college campus."[125] Hampton's Protestant influence and leanings had undeniably permeated its culture since the school's establishment in 1868. The white, Protestant co-founders of the school promoted Christian doctrine as essential to the education of freedmen so that they could develop "moral earnestness" and strong character.[126] The standards for appropriate Christian morality, however, existed to propagate the subservience of African American students to white ideals and the larger American racial hierarchy. As such, the Protestantism to which Howe refers was hardly an insignificant element of Hampton's culture at the time of Lowenfeld's hiring.

Consequently, Howe wondered whether this would serve as a conflict of interest, writing, "I assume Mr. Lowenfeld is Jewish. Personally that raises no objection. One of the good members of our staff is a Jew. Do you think Mr. Lowenfeld would be happy in an institution placing much emphasis upon the Christian religion through its services and ideals?"[127] The question of Lowenfeld's Jewishness, insofar as its religious dimensions, can only be approached speculatively. Unlike many Austro-German Jews of his time, Lowenfeld was by no means detached from specifically Jewish circles, as evidenced by his Zionist leanings and his work with Jewish youth camps. During periods of national crisis and rising antisemitism, when pressure to integrate with Austrian society meant disclaiming one's Jewishness entirely, Viktor and Gretel remained consistent in acknowledging their Jewish identities. Yet the extent of their religious devotion can

[125] Arthur Howe, letter to Gordon Allport, May 23, 1939, Box 1, Item 58, Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb Collection (1999.A.0037.31), The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Digitized Collection, Washington, D.C., n.p.
[126] James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 58.
[127] Arthur Howe, letter to Gordon Allport, May 23, 1939, n.p.

only be estimated through the content of the art which Lowenfeld's early pupils created under his guidance and direction. The Hebraic aesthetics and connotations which featured prominently in the artwork at his and Gretel's summer camp, referenced in the previous chapter, do much to answer the question of his specific relationship to Judaism.

For Lowenfeld, creative expression linked to group consciousness included rooted religious traditions, making the prominence of Christianity at Hampton an entirely relevant topic for his development as a teacher and ally to African American students. Would his immersion in a Christian environment come to represent another roadblock to American integration, or a challenge to the affirmation of his Jewish identity? Or would the likely -- perhaps inevitable -- inclusion of Christian tropes in the artwork of African American students, raised in a distinctly Southern brand of religious belief, contribute to his own evolution as an imaginative artist? Allport's response included no mention of Lowenfeld's religious identity, but only that "he is not particularly Jewish in appearance," reducing his Jewishness to physiognomy and missing the cultural implications of the man's work and scholarship.[128] Allport's reassurance that Lowenfeld did not appear Jewish may not be indicative of his own individual prejudice, but certainly exhibits an acknowledgement of antisemitic biases common in educational hiring at the time. Likewise, Howe's mention of a single Jewish hire at the school as proof of tolerance revealed the low standards for proving an institution's lack of prejudice. Together, both letters indicate the predicament faced by Jewish refugee scholars in the United States, once demonized under Austro-German antisemitism as unacceptable purveyors of intellectualism, and still stigmatized even beyond fascist spaces.

[128] Gordon Allport, letter to Arthur Howe, May 29, 1939, Box 1, Item 60, Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb Collection (1999.A.0037.31), The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Digitized Collection, Washington, D.C., 1.

These disreputable stigmas associated with Jewish scholars in American higher education carried many comparable tropes to antisemitic thought under the rise of Nazism. Under the Nazi worldview, Jewish intellectualism could be defined as having had nefarious designs and was inextricably linked to vilified concepts like cosmopolitanism, internationalism and materialism, among other such threatening ideologies.[129] Jewishness, as it was generally derided, represented a collection of undesirable character traits, including aggression and selfish individualism. These ideas persisted in American institutions, albeit with less fiery rhetoric warning of a destructive threat in Jewish educators, given so few existed in universities. Marjorie Lamberti has termed the American form of this prejudice in higher education "genteel antisemitism," a ubiquitous phenomenon in colleges and universities "staffed by old-stock American Protestants" similar to the faculty makeup of Hampton Institute.[130] Genteel antisemitism was not violent in action nor crude in its rhetoric, enabling its credibility to flourish in professional, upper-class circles, and it considered unrefined, overly ambitious Jews as fact. Nazism's antisemitic platform was so extensive that it denied the Jews any genuine skill pedagogy, not unlike the characterizations of Jewish artistry as imitative and unoriginal discussed in the previous chapter.

In American antisemitism, the barring of Jews from faculty positions was not necessarily rooted in the same belief in inferior teaching capabilities, but rather in their poor upbringings, manners and general demeanor which would have been wholly inappropriate in distinguished and respectable spaces. This is why in recommendation letters for Jewish graduate students, even their advocates stressed how Jewishness had no place in higher education. In the 1930s, historian Daniel J. Boorstin, for instance, was rendered "a Jew, though not the kind to which one takes exception"

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[129] Steven Ascheim, *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1996).

[130] Marjorie Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philantrophy and Social Change in Higher Education" in *Jewish Social Studies* 12.3 (Spring-Summer 2006), 159.

in the words of one recommender.[131] Historian Oscar Handlin, too, was recommended only on the basis that he held "none of the offensive traits which some people associate with his race."[132] Here, the scholar is defended as belonging to academia only because he is a notable exception to the norm of offensive Jewishness. This struggle to break away from one's group identity for recognition as an exceptional individual has been closely paralleled in success stories of African American scholars as well. In facing these perceptions, and from a predominantly Protestant academic world, Lowenfeld and his eventual students shared early commonalities which went beyond the obvious backgrounds of societal persecution. Allport's recommendation of Lowenfeld helped him to secure a place within Hampton, but it too came with the noticeable caveat of his Jewishness being not so apparent that it would become a distraction. Black artists at Hampton, as detailed in chapter three, ascended the art scene but only under the notion that they were also exceptional.

Prior to Lowenfeld's hiring at Hampton, philanthropic efforts to help Jewish refugee scholars surveyed numerous Southern institutions looking for employment openings. The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars began this investigation as early as 1933, following Hitler's ascension to power. According to Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, the organization did not explicitly seek positions for Jews at black colleges and universities. In fact, to be hired at such an institution denoted, for some actors in the organization, "the kiss of death" which would prevent the scholars from ascending the ranks of academia in their future careers.[133] In a letter from the American Friends Service Committee to Thomas Jones, president of the historically black Fisk University in Nashville, this claim can be corroborated in the expressed

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[131] Stephen J. Whitfield, "Influence and Affluence", in *The Columbia History of Jews & Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 148.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges*, 42.

concerns: "I have advised [a Jewish scholar] that, in general, we do not recommend the placement of refugees in [black] institutions because of the double handicap it places them under."[134] The implication in such a phrase as "double handicap" is clear: to teach African Americans was tantamount to career immobility, likely due to perceptions that educational exchanges at historically black colleges or universities (HBCUs) were not intellectually stimulating or impressive enough. That a number of Jewish refugee scholars were placed at HBCUs despite these warnings reveals the reality of antisemitic hiring practices at predominantly white insitutitions. HBCUs may not have been a top choice, or a practical one if the "double handicap" theory held any validity, but they were most certainly an easier means of finding employment in academia for Jewish refugees. Lowenfeld's own words on the prospect of teaching at Hampton, referenced earlier in this section, indicates he held no apparent apprehensions about the stigma of employment at a HBCU. He was instead motivated by his intellect, his passions for creative expression and the pedagogical processes it would entail.

Though his excitement was sincere and believable as an extension of his projects with the blind, the social reality of Lowenfeld's impending acculturation to the Jim Crow South cannot be understated. Since his departure from Vienna, he had lived only in urban New York and residential Watertown, both incomparable to his new physical setting in Phoebus, Virginia, just outside of the Hampton campus. The streets were scarcer, the scenery far more rural and agrarian than what he had known in the sprawling cosmopolises of Vienna and New York. The population was predominantly African American, and the Lowenfelds, possessing only meager financial resources, shared a two-story home with William Moses, a Black professor of architecture and a

[134] Kathleen Hemby Hanstein, letter to Thomas Jones, March 6, 1944, Box 1, Item 17, Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb Collection (1999.A.0037.31), The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Digitized Collection, Washington, D.C., 1.

colleague from Hampton. Moses recalled of the temporary living arrangement, "we felt like they were people that we had known all our lives, who were completely sympathetic, both he and Mrs. Lowenfeld, and his son Johnny … They felt almost like relatives to us. I mean like uncle, aunt, and that sort of thing."[135]

The quick development of such a familial dynamic is intriguing in several ways. Lowenfeld's sympathy, as Moses had described it, was immediate in his interactions with African Americans, likely in part due to his own painful series of afflictions as a targeted minority. Yet Moses' description of Viktor and Gretel as having been like an uncle and aunt to him and his family is most peculiar. Adult friends of the same age range more typically categorize their relationships as sibling-like, which raises questions about the nature of Lowenfeld's interactions in the Hampton community. As a wise and influential educator, Lowenfeld might have conducted himself with a strain of paternalism which speaks to the complicated bonds of whites and African Americans, especially in an intellectual or educational context. This potential truth about the relationships Lowenfeld formed as a member of the Hampton community is important to explore insofar as it can reveal the complexities of interracial allyship and collaboration. It is particularly significant when one considers the institutional history of Hampton as a school rooted in Black subservience and the protection of white societal advantage, the subject of the following subsection.

The Hampton Transition: Industrial Training to Liberalization

In exploring the intersection between American racial politics and the Southern education system, the new space that Lowenfeld moved into is properly contextualized as a platform through

[135] William Moses, transcript of interview, undated (post-1960), Box 3, Folder 9, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, n.p.

which his artistic philosophies were effectively realized. For one, the particularities of the African American experience under the Hampton Institute's pedagogical practices meant it would be an appropriate experiment through which Lowenfeld's criticism of ocularcentric artistry, as detailed in the last chapter, could be tested. As a proud intellect who had built his career on the assertion that the blind were worthy and vital creative voices, Lowenfeld's teaching persona was entirely contradictory to the original aims of Hampton. The only iteration of artistic teaching at Hampton prior to Lowenfeld's arrival was explicitly uncreative: as early as the 1890s, African American students were photographed sketching a cow's anatomy; in another photo, an exclusively male class engaged in mechanical sketching, each of them carefully poring over their notebooks as if to ensure flawless precision.[136] In each example, students were trained to produce a sameness of expression, viewing the objects as objective observers rather than subjective experiencers. Such artwork was hardly artistic at all: it would have allowed no expressionistic flairs, and the subjects were entirely apolitical with no foundations in either individual or group identity. These early sketch exercises were in coherence with the school's initial purpose of training African American students to be skilled laborers especially in agricultural or trade work. As such, rather than equipping its students with the intellectual rigor one might associate with higher education, Hampton had emerged in 1868 as a project aiming for minimal social disruption. Schooling that propagated myths of white superiority and African American subservience were not isolated incidents confined to only some of the region's educational spaces. Such concepts permeated popular education in order to sustain a racial hierarchy wherein African American southerners were trained only to be productive contributors to the emergent laboring force in the postbellum era. Hampton was not just a part of this emerging trend, but rather its pioneer.

[136] Frances B. Johnston, ed. *The Hampton Album: 44 photographs by Frances B. Johnston* (Garden City, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 27-33.

African American slave communities had held a long history of resentment for the lack of educational opportunities afforded to them. Among such groups was a distinct feeling of having been robbed of a universal human right, and in the wake of emancipation, values of "self-help and self-determination" naturally dominated the discourse of freedmen.[137] Such self-sustainment was considered possible through literacy and learning, tools which had always been used to protest their oppression. Whites attempting to reinstate the plantation system opposed education for African American youths, and in their efforts to approximate slavery, insisted on work gangs and continuous labor. James D. Anderson highlights how some ex-slaves, cleverly using their freedom, threatened labor shortages in order to "insist upon educational and economic changes."[138] With the little power they had, these ex-slaves managed to realize some of their educational demands by highlighting their indispensability to the agrarian order of the South. Mass education, when installed, came to be known as a "socialization" process "to instill in black and white children an acceptance of the southern racial hierarchy."[139] These tenets are best represented in what came to be known as the Hampton-Tuskegee Model, conceived by a white northerner, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, and the ex-slave Booker T. Washington. The Hampton Institute's original curriculum trained African American teachers to see the "dignity in labor" in accordance with Protestant morality.[140]

When the school's future president, Dr. Arthur Howe, wrote expressing his concern with Lowenfeld's Jewish background as a potential source of conflict, he was not only referencing the cultural climate of Hampton in 1939, but its entire foundation as a socially conservative institution

[137] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 5.
[138] Ibid, 21.
[139] Ibid, 27.
[140] Ibid, 35.

rooted in the procurement of specifically Christian ideals. The Hampton-Tuskegee Model's combination of Christian and ethical rhetoric with ideas of a "natural" racial hierarchy of labor revealed a kind of continuity with antebellum models of slave education. Just as slaves had rejected myths of their inferiority, students at Hampton often viewed the school with significant suspicion and challenged its promotion of manual labor, as well as its inability to provide opportunities for social mobility. Although Washington readily adopted many of Hampton's mottos, it is clear that the desires for education previously expressed by ex-slaves were not being met by the school's platform. A majority of classroom time in rural Black schools were dedicated to labor exercises, with only minimal portions of the day devoted to academics. Students spent long hours training to sew and cook properly, hardly attaining an education which would prepare them for careers afforded to white contemporaries. Consequently, several African American organizations and communities outright rejected the Hampton idea, with some denouncing Washington as a "traitor" to the race.[141] Others lambasted blatant attempts at subordination, as one scholar wrote in his report on the school's 1876 commencement ceremony: "Visitors were present, white and colored, but not one of the latter was to be seen on the splendid platform of Virginia Hall. The rudest and most ignorant white men and women were politely conducted to the platform; respectable and intelligent colored ladies and gentlemen were shown lower seats where they could neither see nor hear the exercises of the day with any pleasure. To speak in general the colored people and students are made to feel that they must forever remain inferior to their white brethren no matter what their attainments may be."[142] In this account, African American attendees at a public event are spatially rendered inferior, but the author's favorable characterization of Virginia Hall is equally striking.

[141] Ibid, 104.

[142] John Wesley Cromwell, cited in Jearold Winston Holland, *Black Recreation: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Burnham Inc., Publishers, 2002), 176.

Lowenfeld's fervent distaste for historicist architecture meant one of the school's most picturesque buildings, a masterwork of Victorian elegance, was an affront to his artistic principles.

As he articulated in his essay "Art and Society," buildings which "breathe the air of centuries ago" prohibited learners from the "present-day living" experiences which were preferred conditions for fully appreciating one's social surroundings.[143] Virginia Hall, as the institution's long-standing dormitory, would have been especially problematic in that students would be sleeping within walls resembling European styles, therefore forcing them to detach from the contemporary politics which were encouraged in their art. According to Lowenfeld, one "betrays himself when he goes home and lives in a colonial environment of an unsuitable past," making the architectural spaces of the Hampton Institute a considerable challenge to the project of expressing African American political liberation. Nevertheless, the African American author who described Virginia Hall as "splendid" would not have thought in such terms. The anti-historicism which informed Lowenfeld's perspective was an Austro-German concept which he never abandoned in his American career.

Students might have alternatively found such grandiose displays of European architecture on their campus a point of pride or even social progress, rather than visual reminders of oppressive white colonial cultures. Student Thelma Brown's 1971 masters thesis detailing the architectural history of the campus, "The Culmination of the Development of the Campus of Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, 1867-1887" implied as much and served as a testimonial to the school's suitability for historic landmark distinction.[144] Brown juxtaposed the stunning examples of Romanesque Revival structures with the school's earliest class halls, which were mostly shoddy,

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[143] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Art and Society: A Dilemma," 2.

[144] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. (August 1976). *"National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form"*. Retrieved from Virginia Department of Historic Resources Digital Archive.

leftover military barracks.[145] These architectural feats, complete with the campus' sprawling 185-acre waterfront campus, might have rendered anti-historicist concepts insignificant to the African American student body. This potential gap in perspectives regarding Hampton's physical grounds highlights the limitations of Lowenfeld's European-informed philosophies to reach audiences who would have cared little for such interpretations.

To counteract these perceived historicist challenges, Lowenfeld needed to immerse his students in aesthetics which engaged with contemporary political realities. Yet these artistic articulations, and the art program itself through which they came to be expressed, only emerged after decades of national tumult and student initiatives. The conditions which allowed for its development occurred through what can be simplified into three distinct stages: the early preservation of African and African American identities, the 1927 student protests in which students emphatically rallied for the institution to be liberalized, and the Depression era. In the first stage, African American students and communities contributed personal artefacts to the Hampton Museum, founded in 1868 alongside the establishment of the school. The museum was later the recipient of Hampton graduate William H. Sheppard's personal collection of African Art, which he had assembled from trips to the Congo.[146] Its craft pieces ranged from tribal headdresses to musical instruments and as such, the collection constituted a double purpose. For African Americans, its assemblage represented early interests in honoring African heritage and specific group cultures. For white audiences, many of whom would be donating to the institution with motivations of Christian moralizing and recivilization, such items were fascinating examples of primitivism. For northern philanthropists especially, arts and crafts which promoted images of the

[145] Ibid., 207.

[146] John Welch, "Reassessing the Vocational Origins of Hampton University and Celebrating a Singular History of Arts Engagement," The Public Historian, Vol. 40.3 (Aug. 2018): 107-41.

African American South as exotic but spiritually pure reinforced their inclinations to "uplift" the Black race. Booker T. Washington might have known as much. He often presented such artefacts to whites with musical accompaniment in the form of African American students singing Negro spirituals.[147] These occurrences which dated back to Hampton's founding years demonstrated an openness to artistry, but only in ways which perpetuated stereotypes and safely fit into existing racial perceptions.

In the second stage toward liberal education policies, students protested the Hampton-Tuskegee Model on the grounds that it was insufficient in meeting the needs of the student body. The events of the Hampton student strike of 1927, in which students protested white administrators during a film screening in Ogden Hall, were widely reported across national publications. The film was the 1927 silent *Chang*, which depicts a Lao tribesman whose livelihood flounders when he attempts to integrate with urban society.[148] The racist characterizations evident in the film did not prompt the demonstration, but were consistent with Hamptonian trends of propagating racial stereotypes, particularly those which involved ethnic primitivism. According to W.E.B. Du Bois' written report for *The Nation*, the film began to play without the expected dimming of the lights, a sign that white overseers of the event did not trust students to conduct themselves appropriately in a darkened room.[149] A commotion ensued and persisted for several days. Students exercised their own forms of civil disobedience which included refusals to participate in the singing of plantation songs, an enduring staple of the school's church services. In a letter to his friend Du Bois, L.F. Coles pointed to racist and socially conservative traditions on the part of Hampton

[147] Ibid., 121.

[148] Edward Graham, "The Hampton Institute Strike of 1927," *The American Scholar*, Vol. 38.4 (Fall 1969), 668-83.

[149] Du Bois, W. E. B., article draft, 1868-1963. The Hampton strike, November 2, 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, Digital Collection, n.p.

officials as primary catalysts for the student strikes; the lighting incident, in retrospect, was merely the final straw. Coles remarked sharply, "The great trouble with the school generally, as I [see] it, is that they are trying to handle students as if they were little children ... [Faculty] have spent more time trying to teach the Negroes their places and a certain definite kind of education for them than they have spent trying to give them an education that would make them men and women capable of saving the world and its great [problems]."[150]

These descriptions reveal the stereotyped existences forced onto Hampton's student body, and student resistance to such attempts. Just as Washington engaged with Negro spirituals to placate white financiers, the integration of plantation songs into regular church services bolstered white nostalgic fantasies about racial order in the South. By withholding their voices following the strike, students implicitly demanded social progress and the dismantling of antebellum traditions. The lighting incident in Ogden Hall signified gendered stereotypes about African Americans, including males as oversexed and prone to aggressive behavior with women, whom were also implicitly scrutinized as loose. This was why, in the "Petition of the Hampton Students" drafted during the strike, students expressed discomfort with rules regarding dress code and social dancing between men and women.[151] Among other demands, the petition called for "the educational system [to be] especially improved" including the opportunity for electives, and the addition of qualified faculty members, as many teachers had equal or lesser educational history than the students themselves.[152] Lowenfeld, who had earned the equivalent of a doctoral degree in Vienna, would eventually fulfill such hiring requirements. Under his art program, students would be able to seek

[150] Coles, L. F., letter to Du Bois, October 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, Digital Collection, 1.
[151] Edward Graham, "The Hampton Institute Strike of 1927", 675.
[152] Ibid.

their desired electives, whilst engaging in artistry that challenged racial and gender stereotypes rather than affirmed them.

In the third and final stage which led to the development of such a program, the economic ramifications of World War I on white Americans urged Hampton officials to alter the school's curriculum. As whites increasingly sought industrial work, white financiers of institutions like Hampton questioned the feasibility of training African Americans exclusively for jobs which could be performed by white laborers. Depression era unemployment especially enticed the white working class to "accept any grade of work and almost any rate of pay," making the displacement of African American workers in industrial and agricultural fields inevitable.[153] The original Hampton-Tuskegee Model had been rendered entirely futile as a result, allowing for well-funded Black colleges like Hampton to transition into spaces of liberal arts education. These developments coincided with rebellions like the Hampton strike of 1927 and broader movements by African Americans to dramatically change social trends. Black veterans of World War I, along with literary and artistic voices of the Harlem Renaissance, tirelessly pushed for improved educational opportunities.[154] Though the advancement of educational policies at Hampton were predicated on economic pressures concerning poor whites, the role played by African American students and activists were also instrumental in achieving the desired progress. Yet even under these improvements, the nature of education at Hampton was still deeply embedded in a culture of white paternalism. The collapse of industrial training prompted white officials and financiers to refocus their goals toward building racial coalitions which still assumed Black subordination. The new platform was intended to "influence more directly the training of black leaders," thereby

[153] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South,* 235.

[154] Hoda M. Zaki, *Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute: The Legacy of Alonzo G. Moron* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 18.

recognizing the rising frequency of prominent African American voices, many of which were presumed to be radical.[155] These influential voices seen in movements like the Harlem Renaissance needed to be tempered and controlled in spaces of higher education like Hampton.

Education for African American southerners, in the minds of many white investors, was still a preventative measure against potential incivility in emerging American political discourse. The activistic tendencies of student bodies was effective yet problematic to its white audiences. Hampton's institutional history therefore highlights both the South's clinging for antebellum-like social conditions and the political consciousness of students who understood fully the scheme they were being drawn into. Considering Hampton's original purpose in upholding a racist social hierarchy, Lowenfeld's invitation to pioneer the school's art program was especially revolutionary and indicative of these stages of social progress. The dedication of time to creating politically cognizant artwork must be viewed as an incredible testament to the drastic changes in African American education, including its purposes and benefits. When students like John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis attended Hampton and adopted art as their focus of study, they effectively realized the desires of ex-slaves who originally insisted upon an education that could represent self-sustainment and intellectual evolution. These are tenets which, when compared to the Expressionism and creative exercises of blind students, were fully agreeable with Lowenfeld's preconceived ideas about the societal advantages of producing art.

Lowenfeld's Theory of Haptic Artistry

Lowenfeld most clearly articulated such notions of art's social power through his "haptic-visual" theory regarding mankind's innate propensities for creative expression. Under this philosophy, creativity was a natural asset which emerged in different ways in different people,

[155] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 263.

depending largely upon one's social conditioning. The domination of ocular sensibility which Lowenfeld had forcefully worked against in Vienna was ridiculed most plainly in his haptic-visual scheme. Individuals could either be haptically minded, or "subjectively bound up with the self," or visually minded, "objective" observers who become acquainted with their physical environment mainly through their eyes.[156] Haptics, by comparison, are poor observers yet more connected to their surroundings which they experience through kinaesthetic awareness. Lowenfeld's consistent emphasis on Expressionism and its emotionalist renderings in art, in complete opposition to the "sameness of expression" which contributed to totalitarian societies, meant his personal preference in artists were the haptically minded individuals. At Hampton and other institutions where Lowenfeld taught, students began their coursework with a drawing test to determine one's haptic or visual aptitude. Instructions were uncomplicated: draw a chess board on a table, a house's chimney, or a staircase, among other such mundanities.[157]

Hundreds of student responses, which Gretel Lowenfeld saved and archived, reveal the diversions in human perspective. Some students depicted such objects as clearly distant observers, providing a full picture of chess boards on tables, a house's chimney as one small part of the larger whole, or an entire set of stairs situated within a foyer or living room. Lowenfeld labelled such submissions as visual. Others drew perspectives that more closely relayed their own tactual interactions with such objects: three-dimensional views of chess boards, close-ups of chimneys or people sitting adjacent to them on roofs, or the apparent ascending or descending of stairs. These submissions Lowenfeld labelled as haptic. Of all the available tests, a majority of student drawings from Hampton are predominantly visual, though several tests produced mixed results.

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[156] Viktor Lowenfeld, teaching materials, n.d., Box 1, Folder 62, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, n.p.
[157] Ibid.

Lowenfeld might have found that Hampton produced an unusually high number of haptic artists, or was guided to think in such a way based on cultural biases. He found that with African American artists, haptically minded perspectives were only natural. In his essay entitled "Negro Art Expression," written between late 1944 and early 1945, Lowenfeld categorizes "the Negro" as essentially haptic due to her or his past and present struggles with societal oppression.[158] Their art, he testified, was about one's experience *with* objects, partly the result of a heritage defined by restrictions and limited spatial perspectives, an idea rooted in the physical confinements of slavery. Individuals with more political liberties, Lowenfeld presumed, could imagine a physical scope beyond what was immediately present and thus were inclined toward visually minded drawings. "The further the optical experience recedes into the background," Lowenfeld theorized in *The Nature of Creative Activity*, "the less important does the eye become as the intermediary of the concept … the importance of the environment diminishes and experience is more and more confined to the processes that go on in the body as a whole."[159] Lowenfeld was referring to bodily sensations and the inclination to rely on tactile perceptions which permitted the artist to possess a stronger "experience of self."[160] Essentially, he conceived of haptic artists as blind and therefore inclined toward greater expressions of their inner selves, unspoiled by objective visual observation.

For both African American artists and Jews, it seemed to Lowenfeld, haptically minded artwork might be used as a survival mechanism because such subjective perspectives could only come about through necessary self-centeredness and community preservation.[161] He characterized African American artistic inclinations as haptic due to a number of social factors which demanded

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[158] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", n.d., Box 1, Item 91, Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb Collection (1999.A.0037.31), The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Digitized Collection, Washington, D.C., pp.1-8.
[159] Viktor Lowenfeld, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, 82.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", 1-8.

both identity affirmation and communal survival, consistent themes in his own Zionist work. These factors included: the "heritage of the Negro … the special social status of the Negro within America … [and] the influence of the Western civilization and culture on the Negro."[162] The first two categories referred mainly to legacies of enslavement and oppression. The latter concerned the overwhelming pervasiveness of European art styles which had threatened to prevent consistent engagement with traditional African aesthetics. Hampton students, Lowenfeld observed, showed little desire to study African art, and were "rather ashamed or uneasy when confronted with [its] 'primitivity'."[163] The collected materials in the Hampton Museum, which Lowenfeld would eventually curate throughout his tenure, were no longer a source of pride, but of embarrassment to a new generation of students who had partly been conditioned to reject what was assumed to be unsophisticated. "It is seemingly inconceivable to them," Lowenfeld continued, "that a short time ago these products of art could have been their own art expression. America has transplanted them from the world of symbols into the world of reality in a very abrupt way."[164] The world of symbols to which Lowenfeld referred were haptic symbols, or abstract and emotionalist flairs. The world of reality which Lowenfeld lamented were grounded in objective observance, therefore less imaginative and less of an expression of the inner self. Lowenfeld recognized African artistry as inherently haptic, but clearly feared that the prevalence of European aesthetics would threaten the haptic instincts of his students. Consequently, he theorized that the African American artist "has by no means freed himself from the influences which were partly superimposed upon him."[165] The solution was similar to his own history of creating opportunities for Jewish communal and personal

[162] Ibid., 4-5.
[163] Ibid., 5.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.

solidarity or affirmation in Austrian spaces of antisemitism. He wrote, "only the Negro artist who has again found his true self will be able to face freely and consciously his great heritage given to him by his African ancestors."[166] The artist's "true self", then, was inseparable from her or his heritage and the cultivation of group consciousness. These modes of thinking are paralleled in Lowenfeld's artistic journey in Linz and Vienna. The "self-realization" he experienced as a Jew was entwined with his Expressionist inclinations as an artist, and the sense of Jewish community he and Gretel encouraged among youth groups were wholly attached to ancestry and heritage.

Lowenfeld had therefore merged the suffering of both African Americans and Jews into a cohesive template for artistic collaboration and shared empathy. This connection allowed him to continue forward with the artistic ideologies he had formed in Vienna, meaning his emigration reinforced rather than erased his Jewishness. Though the precise details of Lowenfeld's living arrangement with Moses Williams and his family are largely unknown, his immersion in that household and community afforded him proximity to the social issues relevant to African Americans in the area. From this closeness, Lowenfeld was able to identify in Hampton's students the opportunity to transfer his European ideas into a new cultural space, where he would insist upon further use of haptically minded art as a tool for political liberation.

Yet despite these early parallels, Lowenfeld's perceptions of African American artistry were still mired in racial stereotypes. Haptically minded art, under Lowenfeld's theory, still approached primitivism. In one interpretation, primitivity is merely a stripping away of ocular domination, but in another, it engaged with ideas that exoticized ethnic cultures and heritages. For Lowenfeld, Jews were not inherently haptic; it was simply the most sensible form of expression for an oppressed group. African Americans, however, were characteristically haptic. Lowenfeld

[166] Ibid.

also overlooked the irony in proposing that his students need not be influenced by Western ideologies about art, though his insistence on appreciating one's heritage was sincere and beneficial to all who adhered. Nevertheless, these complexities behind Lowenfeld's dynamic with his students call into question the pervasiveness of stereotyping even among two groups which were similarly targeted for being nonwhite within the same historical period. The following section therefore considers how Lowenfeld himself might have been subjected to preconceived notions about Jews within African American communities.

African American Perceptions of Jews in the Era of Nazism

Even among the white faculty at Hampton, who appeared there in numbers equal to African American professors if Arthur Howe's estimations are correct, few would have been quite like Lowenfeld. Not only was he the only Jew in a faculty position, but with his Austrian accent and habits, he carried with him the distinct mark of foreignness, certainly a different type of man than the student and faculty bodies would have been used to. The atmosphere which Lowenfeld found himself in was also entirely unlike his previous attempts to establish himself within American society. In 1939, when he began teaching at Hampton, Lowenfeld was not yet perceived as a victim or survivor of the Holocaust, but was instead as a Jewish refugee whose plight still had hopes for improvement and relative stability. The attitudes toward this particular moment in the evolution of the Holocaust can be drawn from various African American publications prior to 1940, several of which were collected by the Howard University master's student Lunabelle Wedlock in 1941.

The clearest difference and source of tension between the two groups in the 1930s was class. Jews were perceived as wealthy, and though antisemitic myths have greatly distorted the facts surrounding Jewish finances, nearly half of all American Jews attained professional or

management positions.[167] Jewish enrollment in colleges were notably higher than among African Americans, in spite of barriers and quotas preventing steady opportunities at most elite institutions. Historically, dynamics between Jews and working African Americans had been entirely lopsided in landowner-tenant or housewife-maid dynamics, and in some cases these relationships were exploitative.[168] African Americans were given less opportunities for the kind of prosperity the American Dream promoted, in part because of the Ashkenazic Jewish privilege of having white skin. Yet several publications in Wedlock's collection regard the Jews as a separate race of their own due to their persecution at the hands of the Nazis. As early as the summer of 1933, black publications were drawing connections between the two sites of racially based oppression. In *The Washington Tribune*, journalist Kelly Miller wrote, "Africans were building pyramids and Jews temples, while Germans were still barbarians … Hitler wants the Jew to get out of Germany entirely. Georgia fears the Negro will lower the level of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Hitler fears the Jews will raise it too high."[169]

Miller's interpretation here, while pointing to similar narratives of historical oppression faced by both groups, reveals a broader African American perception of cultural Jewry. Whereas African Americans in his view, quite accurately, were demonized as figures of incivility and regression, Jews might have represented a high-mindedness and the elevation of civilization, perhaps by way of their perceived social influence. Though Jews were indisputably rising in the ranks throughout Europe after periods of emancipation, Miller misses that Jews, too, were denigrated as harbingers of regressive culture. Hitler feared the rise of the Jew, but it was

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[167] Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 153.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Kelly Miller, quoted in "The Reaction of Negro Publications and Organizations to German Antisemitism" by Lunabelle Wedlock (Washington, D.C.: The Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences, 1941), 35.

absolutely akin to the plundering of an otherwise respectable Austro-German culture. Other publications throughout the 1930s directly scolded America's political reality and used the Nazi persecution of Jews as a strategic flagging of intolerable conditions. In 1936, the *Afro-American* labelled the South and Nazi Germany "mental brothers" only differentiated by the United States Constitution.[170] Still others saw the emerging Holocaust as a warning for future African American destruction, or a call to prevent the drastic outcomes of fascism overseas: in February 1939 *The Crisis* wrote, "Negroes in this country still have -- in most sections -- the right to protest and work to improve their lot. In Germany the Jews have no such privilege. There is no hope."[171] Newspapers like this highlighted the potential inescapability of racial intolerance through emphasizing the connectedness between the two persecuted groups.

Certainly in many publications was an activistic element, as Reverend Adam C. Powell's editorial demonstrated: "Apathy spells our own doom. Our only success is to stop fascism … We must aid the Jew in Germany … In any land, wherever the cry goes up, 'it is arms for freedom!' we must answer!"[172] Though an overwhelming majority of publications express sympathy for the Jewish plight, and a certain spiritual kinship born from shared oppression, there were the occasional antisemitic publications which indicate generally the deep extent to which tensions between these groups existed. In one article, Hitler's designs were nearly defended as a rational response to the Jewish "international thinking element" which apparently pervaded world society.[173] In another, the persecution of Jews was practically celebrated as comeuppance, for in both Europe and the American South, "Jews use all of the tricks of the Jewish faith, for example,

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[170] Lunabelle Wedlock, ed. "The Reaction of Negro Publications and Organizations to German Antisemitism" (Washington, D.C.: The Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences, 1941), 38.
[171] Ibid., 40.
[172] Adam C. Powell, quoted in "The Reaction of Negro Publications and Organizations to German Antisemitism" by Lunabelle Wedlock (Washington, D.C.: The Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences, 1941), 53.
[173] Lunabelle Wedlock, ed. "The Reaction of Negro Publications and Organizations to German Antisemitism," 87.

high pressure salesmanship … They are in everything where they can make a dollar from Negroes. Jews just want all the money they can get."[174] These sentiments were largely unusual, but present enough so that an alliance between African Americans and Jews in response to Nazi persecution was not without its complexities or irritations. In some scenarios, the white American concern for Jewish plight overseas represented a source of frustration for those African Americans who felt both oppressed and neglected in their own nation. This in turn might have helped foster some animosity toward the Jews, the recipients of the empathy which had consistently been denied to African American communities facing similar crises of racialized targeting.

In any case, these publications help establish both the intellectual and common strains of thought within African American circles pertaining to Jews and especially Jewish refugees fleeing the described scenarios. From these expressed sympathies, and the parallels drawn between similar social conditions faced by both groups, it could be reasoned that Lowenfeld's status at Hampton upon first arriving was compelling to his African American students. They understood the circumstances of his being there, as he was never hesitant to discuss his personal motivations, and it might be that his experiences in a toxic culture of intolerance enabled an early openness to trusting an otherwise strange and alien figure. Though the majority of students were followers of Christian doctrine, if historical narratives can reveal anything about student bodies at Hampton, it is that the institution's support of existing racial hierarchies were obvious and well-known. Skepticism toward white professors persisted into the 1930s and 1940s, making Lowenfeld's unique status as a Jewish refugee scholar an intriguing change of pace to students. Upon beginning the art program at Hampton, Lowenfeld immediately attracted sizable crowds of hundreds of students, both a testament to his magnetic qualities as a man and teacher, as well as the refreshing

[174] Ibid, 143.

experiment that was an education in the arts for African American students. Lowenfeld's presentation of his haptic-visual theory set the tone for his practices at Hampton: in order for his students to achieve some semblance of political liberty, their artwork would combine expressionistic traditions with a focus on African ancestry and heritage. These models of artistic pedagogy were rooted in his own experiments with affirming Jewish identities, making it the first concrete example of cultural exchange, sensitivity and identification in this narrative.

CHAPTER III:

"Art Finds Its Salvation": Viktor Lowenfeld's Hamptonian Years, 1939-1946

Viktor Lowenfeld's Teaching Practices and "The Negro's Burden"

When Viktor Lowenfeld began his teaching career at the Hampton Institute in the fall semester of 1939, the artistic and pedagogical theories he cultivated in Austria conveniently coincided with the social conditions of the American South. The gradual persecution of Jews under European antisemitism had necessitated for Lowenfeld and his community a creativity which promoted both individual and communal affirmations of identity. Likewise, under the reality of American racism, Lowenfeld encouraged his African American students to produce art which represented their authentic selves, chipping away at the stifling omnipresence of European styles. This involved stronger connection with ancestral and cultural pasts, tropes which Lowenfeld combined with his haptic theory of free, emotionalist expressions that avoided the sameness of expression regimented by dominant groups.

By creating art which proudly exhibited ties to heritage, Lowenfeld's students would need to reject myths of such African aesthetics as shameful, unworthy or exotic as in the mentalities of the larger art world. But they would also be forced to engage and reconcile painful legacies of oppression, realities with which Lowenfeld himself struggled especially when the totality of the Holocaust had been learned. Through these paralleled experiences of haptic art production which affirmed group consciousness, Lowenfeld and his students collaborated in an experiment that suggested a kinship between Jews and African Americans. Their relationship represented a political alliance against societal intolerance by focusing their art on opposition to totalitarianism and white supremacist concepts. Nevertheless, it was also fraught with complications, both

stemming from intolerant artistic institutions in the United States, and the imperfect, imbalanced pedagogical dynamic between a Jewish mentor and his African American mentees.

Such a dynamic started with the specific teaching techniques Lowenfeld used in the earliest days of the new art program at Hampton. Borrowing from his experiences of instructing the blind, Lowenfeld pushed the students to develop stronger haptic capabilities through blindfolded sculpting. Lowenfeld later reflected to an art education journal on the European origins of such practices: "shortly after World War I … one of my teachers, belonging to a group of French sculptors, tried to emphasize the three-dimensional quality of a sculpture by excluding visual perception. We were asked to blindfold our eyes during the process, for he felt that light and shadow, and above all, the one-sided visual impression of a sculpture diverts from the intrinsic values of three-dimensional expression."[175] These methods of learning, Lowenfeld speculated, brought "esthetic enjoyment and deep emotional satisfaction" to those performing them.[176] His colleague and friend William Moses confirmed the enthusiastic response from Hampton students to Lowenfeld's innovative course offerings despite administrative anxiety that the experiment would flounder. He recalled,

"When the class was proposed it was expected that possibly a total of a dozen students would respond … there was a small charge to cover the cost of materials. Since Hampton Institute students, most of whom work their way through school, have little free time on their hands and almost no spare pennies, a large response to this invitation was entirely unexpected."[177]

[175] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Leaders in Art Education," *Arts and Activities* (Vol. 38.1), circa 1950s, Box 28, Folder 15, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, 3.
[176] Ibid.
[177] William Moses, transcript of interview, undated (post-1960), n.p.

Yet, within three weeks of offering the course as a free elective, Lowenfeld found himself teaching eighty six students. Throughout his stay at Hampton, he encountered hundreds of students with interests in the art program, although, as Williams testified, Lowenfeld did "attempt to discourage any students whose interest was merely a passive whim, by pointing out that the course was only for those who loved self-expression in art for its own sake, and were willing to give their time to it without any specific hope."[178] Only those committed to the project of individual and community cultivation were advised to dedicate their time to an emotionally intensive process of art production. Consequently, enrollment dropped, but a solid sixty students remained consistently invested in Lowenfeld's teaching. The unexpected interest of students allowed Lowenfeld to expand his elective course into a full-fledged art program.

Hampton administrators were also intrigued by Lowenfeld's activities, although their interests were certainly what he would have called passive whims. His responses to the work produced by Hampton president Max MacLean displayed his characteristic boldness and his belief that art reflected one's emotional positionality and social status. In one session, Lowenfeld instructed his class, under observation by MacLean and other faculty, to paint the campus' waterfront landscape. MacLean's painting was deemed "stiff" and "tense" as were the other works of white Hampton officials; the African American students' paintings, by contrast, were "dancing all over the place."[179] These interpretations by Lowenfeld signaled his conviction that the art one produced was intrinsically related to "how they felt inside themselves," although the possibility exists that confirmation bias colored his perceptions of these particular paintings.[180] No matter the validity of his claims, Lowenfeld conducted the art program with the impression that haptically-

[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.

minded African American artists would benefit from Expressionist aesthetics and the reconstruction of heritage and identity. Doing so would enable a reconciliation with one's contemporary social and political issues. Lowenfeld's efforts to procure such processes was evident in many of his classroom prompts. In another painting session with students, Lowenfeld simply instructed them to "imagine what it feels like carrying everything that you own on your back."[181] Lowenfeld himself participated in this exercise, but did not mention the Jewish experience. Instead, in an attempt to engage with his audience, he painted "The Negro's Burden," in which the subject is a Black male stumbling and struggling under the weight of a seemingly intolerable mass.[182]

Figure 3.1 Viktor Lowenfeld, *The Negro's Burden*, 1943.[183]

[181] Teacher Resource Portfolio, "The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room," undated, Box 53, Folder 10, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, n.p.
[182] Viktor Lowenfeld, painting, "The Negro's Burden", 1943-1945, Box 18, Folder 40, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.
[183] Ibid.

"The Negro's Burden" represented, for Lowenfeld, an accumulation of centuries of oppression for African Americans. In the image, the appearance of the weight being carried transcends that of literal baggage. It is massive, flowing and cloudlike, as if to suggest the burden is not merely a physical trial but an all-consuming reality. Its sturdy, thick knots counteract the rickety nature of the figure's bony hands and body, demonstrating that the burden of racial injustice is exhausting yet not enough to completely overcome the man's perseverance. The painting followed Expressionist and haptic traditions in that the figure appears to be stranded in some peculiar and ambiguous space, not fixed to any place, though his emotional state is clearly articulated to the viewer. The piece, with its combination of subjective expression, recollection of a heritage specific to a community, and implicit criticism of contemporary living conditions fulfilled Lowenfeld's artistic missions at Hampton.

The work of Lowenfeld's students in response to this exercise mirrored "The Negro's Burden" in several ways. Though no surviving copy exists, John T. Biggers painted, as described in teaching resources using his work, "a family -- mother, father, and three sons -- [walking] across a bridge with three large packages."[184] The premise is simplistic yet the meaning is debatable: did Biggers depict a family on the move, or were they perhaps on their way to sell the contents of the packages? No matter the specific motivation behind his characters, the theme of movement and transition connected his piece to Lowenfeld's. The inclusion of an entire family as opposed to one individual rendered Lowenfeld's initial prompt a communal experience of displacement and travel. Both Lowenfeld's figure and Biggers' family undergo long, likely strenuous journeys, making the prompt an exercise in acknowledging hardships faced by African Americans. Biggers later remarked that it was his first attempt at creative art, and as such, the figures resembled "little, natty

[184] Teacher Resource Portfolio, "The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room,"n.p.

things" rather than real people.[185] Yet under Lowenfeld's haptic theory, precision mattered less than the portrayal of emotional, inner truths. The personal implications of Biggers' work are clearly located in his upbringing and the conditions which led him to Lowenfeld's classroom.

The Path to Hampton: Introducing John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis

Just as Lowenfeld's boyhood and adolescent ordeals as a Jew politicized his artistic philosophies, many of his students similarly imbued their expressions with themes of racial oppression. His two best-known pupils, John T. Biggers and Samella Lewis, followed personal and artistic trajectories which, when juxtaposed with Lowenfeld's, reveal the basis for their empathetic connection but also their natural points of diversion. In 1924, John T. Biggers was born in Gastonia, North Carolina to Paul, the principal of a three-room schoolhouse, and Cora, a housemaid to white families.[186] Before his sudden death in 1937, Paul instilled in his son an appreciation for education, while Cora's subsequent tenacity in supporting him and his seven siblings informed the feminist undertones of his later artistic career. John's earliest aesthetic encounters involved watching his mother and grandmother "assembling colors, shapes and textures for quiltmaking," which enabled him to witness African American artistry from a young age.[187] His educational ambitions, however, never involved art as a potential focus or hobby until he arrived at the Hampton Institute in the fall semester of 1941. Of his original intentions at Hampton, Biggers later remarked, "I went to Hampton to learn to be a plumber [because] the economic urge was always present."[188] A career in plumbing was perhaps the sensible response and solution to an upbringing which was mired in the tragedy of his father's death and the poverty

[185] Ibid.
[186] Alvia Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, corrected proofs*, n.p.
[187] Interview transcript, "Artists Series: An interview with John Biggers," 1983, Box 59, Folder 4, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, 4.
[188] Ibid.

of his family's living conditions in rural North Carolina. His cousin, Nolan Brooks, had managed to start a successful plumbing company even in the worst years of despair during the Depression.[189]

Despite its apparent practicality, the plumbing trade offered Biggers little sense of personal satisfaction, especially in light of his witnessing the unjust social realities of the day. "When I left home [for college]," Biggers reflected, "I couldn't get over the treatment of women; the image of a mule in harness with blinders on kept coming to mind. My mother said it was just the way of society but I could never accept this."[190] Their gaps in perspective relating to unequal conditions faced by men and women, and by different races, were not merely generational. To suggest so would be to deny the revolutionary power and ideas of the women and men of Cora Biggers' generation, many of whom had been instrumental in attaining the educational (and co-educational) standards Hamptonian students of the 1940s would come to experience. Biggers' resistance to trade jobs in favor of an artistry which expressed societal dissatisfaction and the upending of racial and gender stereotypes can instead be traced back to his specific childhood and adolescent experiences. He was notably perceptive to gendered and racial dynamics of the day, as his first meaningful encounter with popular art was seeing the Petty girls, white pin-up drawings by the artist George Petty for Esquire magazine.[191] Such images in a publication intended for male consumers inevitably contributed to fashion and beauty norms which extolled whiteness as the feminine ideal.

Contrarily, the African American women in his life were those most worthy of praise and those whom he most cherished and idolized. Biggers remembered that Ferrie, his oldest sister, would carry him on her hip daily, "much to the concern of the adults in [his] neighborhood, who

[189] Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, corrected proofs*, n.p.
[190] Interview transcript, "Artists Series: An interview with John Biggers," 5.
[191] Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, corrected proofs*, n.p.

scolded her for weighing down her posture."[192] In such observations, concerns over the girl's body overshadowed both the kindness and indispensability of her actions in helping to raise the family. Women's contributions to the family's survival were always recognized by Biggers as essential, and he became intimately familiar with the anxious nature of domestic work. To assist his mother, Biggers would often deliver laundry to white homes, but upon crossing into white spaces was attacked with muddy rocks and sticks by boys his age. Protecting the cleanliness of the laundry was more important than protecting himself, as it was their greatest source of income.[193] These narratives of Biggers' youth contain commonalities which permeated much of his adult artistry, including his first artistic creation made under Lowenfeld's prompt. Delivering and protecting delicate things was the reality of his family's existence, as was female labor, making his initial attempt at art a successful reflection of both his inner self and his entire community. This engagement with his heritage and communal identity meant Biggers was instantly a promising student under Lowenfeld's notions of haptically-minded, socially informed creativity.

Although Biggers and Samella Lewis both enrolled at Hampton during Lowenfeld's six-year tenure, the circumstances of their upbringings differ in that the latter student had always been immersed in scenes of art. Lewis was born in 1924 in New Orleans, where frequent encounters with artists in the French Quarter inspired within her a passion for painting.[194] Lewis' mother worked as a domestic for a German family, the owners of a brewery, where Lewis spent much of her childhood playing with white children. This early exposure to Germans and other diverse nationalities might have transitioned into relative comfort in meeting Lowenfeld, whose cultural difference was striking to others at Hampton. European artistic customs were also introduced to

[192] Interview transcript, "Artists Series: An interview with John Biggers," 5.
[193] Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, corrected proofs*, n.p.
[194] Interview transcript, "Interview with Samella Lewis, Tape #1" 1993, Box 66, Folder 7, Samella S. Lewis Papers (1132), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, pp. 1-29.

Lewis during her youth. She later remembered a generous schoolteacher's gift to her, a "history of art" book which she could only identify as entirely Eurocentric in hindsight. "They were all European paintings, of course," she claimed, "there was Van Gogh, and Rembrandt, and Rubens. I never tried to copy anything, but I really enjoyed the book so much that it stimulated me … [but] not necessarily in wanting to be an artist."[195] It was significant in Lewis' intellectual development that her first exposure to so-called "serious" art, the kind that became the subject of books, was exclusively white and European. The instances of quiltmaking which Biggers experienced, as well as other traditions common to African American households in the South, would not have been classified as legitimate practices of art by mainstream American standards. This limited perception of what forms of creativity constituted artistry rendered both Biggers and Lewis unable to imagine themselves in artistic modes, as the latter only enjoyed painting as a frivolous hobby.

Lewis also characterized art as an inappropriate venue for herself due to her family's relatively stable financial circumstances and her own well-roundedness. "I don't think I ever had in my head that I wanted to be an artist," she recalled, because "we were taught that artists were people who were always in poverty and were kind of mentally deranged."[196] Art under this characterization was something to be embarrassed by, perhaps a last resort, and it represented the artist having a pathetic mentality as her or his primary motivation. Lewis' first, albeit unofficial art teacher was an Italian man, Alfredo Galli, who sold portrait paintings in the French Quarter.[197] After noticing Lewis' interest in his work, Galli invited her for free portrait lessons, where she was able to cultivate technical skills many of her fellow Hampton students originally lacked. Yet these aesthetics which Lewis had been trained in as an adolescent would have to be undone by

[195] Ibid, 8.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., 9.

Lowenfeld, for precision-oriented portrait work was antithetical to his ideas of free Expressionism. Galli spoke to her frequently about the "evils of modern art." He was a traditionalist, and one who strived for the sameness of expression which Lowenfeld so strongly resented. At the time, Lewis would have thought little about Galli's opinions on modernity, but she did carry his portraiture lessons into her personal life and began to sell portraits of her own to friends and family.

With her hobby having been transformed into a potentially sustainable career, Lewis decided to pursue an education in the fine arts. In 1941, she enrolled at Dillard University, a New Orleans-based HBCU, but soon left at the encouragement of famed artist and educator Elizabeth Catlett.[198] The opportunities for artistry to blossom at Dillard were limited by an inadequate program platform, though Catlett's presence as an African American and female artist helped Lewis imagine herself more favorably. Lewis reflected, "Elizabeth was certainly extremely important in terms of helping me develop a sense of not just worth and value, but a way to look at other people and value them."[199] The model of an African American woman thriving as an artist was reassuring to Lewis, who had initially considered art a subject irrelevant to her interests. Catlett recommended that Lewis instead study at Hampton under the intriguing new program of a man named Viktor Lowenfeld.[200] Already by this time, then, Lowenfeld's practices at Hampton were circulating among Black colleges and artistic dialogues, a testament to both his rapid success in establishing noteworthy pedagogy and the quick enthusiasm of his clearly passionate students.

When Lewis transferred to Hampton and encountered the likes of Lowenfeld and Biggers, she had developed a few discernible characteristics in her artistry as a result of this New Orleanian history. One was an appreciation for African American women, a consequence of observing

[198] Ibid., 14.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., 15.

Catlett's success in the field, and an admiration she would share with Biggers. Another was an inclination for Eurocentric, traditionalist styles, the result of her interactions with art and artists in the French Quarter. The latter trait was problematic to Lowenfeld who had bemoaned the constraints Western modes of art had on African American artists who were, he claimed, better suited to haptic and Expressionist traditions. Ironically, then, Lowenfeld was himself enforcing Austro-German-informed concepts upon his students, leading to moments of both tension and productivity in his interactions with Lewis.

"Negro Art Expression" and the Artistry of Hampton Students

Such strains in the dynamic between Lowenfeld and Lewis first emerged from their individual interpretations of what artistic processes should have entailed. Lewis' intention to study fine arts was results-oriented, with little concern for the therapeutic elements Lowenfeld emphatically stressed. In Lewis' approach, the precision she had been trained to strive for in portraiture was a worthwhile skill, but for Lowenfeld, creative power could be characterized less by accuracy than by the emotion felt by the artist. Ever since working with the blind, Lowenfeld maintained that art's benefit was one's ability to "gain self-confidence through their own creative achievement no matter how primitive it may be," therefore endorsing Expressionism and its cathartic potential.[201] Lowenfeld's perceptions of African American artistry were cloaked in the assumption that haptic art production was its key to liberation from Western influence and Eurocentrism. One can imagine, then, his forcefulness and rigidity in promoting his theories in the classroom, and perhaps Lewis' resistance to being told what to do, especially by a white man. Hamptonian students of prior generations had already expressed discontent with the number of white faculty, making Lowenfeld's position as art critic to Black work potentially problematic.

[201] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Therapeutic Aspects of Art Education," 1.

Yet Lowenfeld's Jewishness, known to all of his students, might have softened any opposition to white control over African American education due to its racial ambiguities. Jews, after all, were not yet "white" in the same way other European ethnic groups had been in the 1940s.[202]

Lowenfeld's own interest on the uplifting of African cultural pasts was another source of tension. As Lewis had previously encountered Eurocentric concepts of high art, his insistence on the intrinsic beauty and importance of African aesthetics might have come across as patronizing, however sincere his convictions were. The only other prominent art figure whom Lewis had seen engaging with Blackness was Elizabeth Catlett, and even her works were mainly grounded in depictions of African Americans, not the "primitivism" of African tribal cultures which Lowenfeld elevated in his use of the Hampton Museum's art and artifacts in the classroom. Students had come of age in a world where African and African American styles were not valued in the same way European works were, which contributed to Lewis' shame upon seeing items from the Hampton Museum brought into their classroom.[203]

Upon later reflection, Lewis credited Lowenfeld for helping her to see "[her] weaknesses," but recalled a moment of combativeness in their relationship.[204] "I wouldn't associate with certain people [in art]," she said, "[and] he asked in a very strange way, 'don't you like those people?' [He asked] whether I was, you know there are blacks that are biased against other blacks."[205] Lewis resented the insinuation that she was in some way intolerant, but Lowenfeld remained convinced, as he articulated in his essay "Negro Art Expression in America," that many students felt self-conscious about African art and none came into the program intending to study it.[206] Lowenfeld

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[202] Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 138-174.
[203] Interview transcript, "Interview with Samella Lewis, Tape #1" 1993, 20.
[204] Ibid., 21.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", 5.

also questioned Lewis' relationships with her fellow students, given that she had come to Virginia from New Orleans, a city with a reputation of a color caste among African Americans.[207] Lewis recalled, "He wanted to find out whether I was a victim or whether I was trying to victimize someone."[208] Lowenfeld's meddling in the interpersonal relationships of his students might merely reflect the common concerns of a teacher, but given his growing awareness of American racial dynamics, it is likely he also wished to foster communal unity against threats of colorism and division. This goal would have coincided with his experiences in bringing together Jewish youths for the purposes of group consciousness, one of the central tenets of his haptically-minded, political art.

Despite these conflicts, Lewis and other students integrated Lowenfeld's concepts with the art they created at the Hampton Institute and beyond. Remarking on what caused her to shift her attitude on the usefulness of African tropes in art, Lewis said, "[Lowenfeld] taught us to let us examine our own situations. He led us [to] teach ourselves. And then he would come in when he felt that we had a strong enough voice to argue with him."[209] Lewis came to appreciate the opportunity to be challenged and to have her artwork be put into an open dialogue, perhaps satisfying desires for legitimization. She began to view the invocation of African symbols and aesthetics as an opportunity for reclamation and cultural reconnection to her ancestral past. In past artistic traditions, Lewis later wrote, "Blacks were not completely ignored by white artists … they were depicted as benevolent 'darkies,' or buffoons."[210]

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[207] Interview transcript, "Interview with Samella Lewis, Tape #1" 1993, 21.

[208] Ibid. Lewis was relatively light-skinned,and had a white grandparent. This in combination with a childhood and adolescence in which she maintained consistent ties to white and European communities made her somewhat unique to the Hampton student body.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Samella Lewis, "Art and Aesthetics (A Minority Report)," n.d., Box 62, Folder 2, Samella S. Lewis Papers (1132), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, 3.

By allowing African heritage to permeate her own work, Lewis and others were able to recast such depictions in ways that were less stereotypical. This opportunity to defeat racial caricatures in art would constitute liberation from Eurocentrism in ways that Lowenfeld had not considered or articulated in his essay. Yet his early instructions in Jewish youth camps did entail Hebraic drawings, allowing those artists to perform the same work of reclamation in an antisemitic environment where caricatures also existed. Therefore, Lowenfeld's overall project of affirming group consciousness through cultural and ancestral connections lent itself to this type of work in both Austria and the United States. These actions were inherently political in that they opposed the dominant, oppressive group's right to stifle or demonize the free creative expressions of Jews and African Americans. To fight these forces, Lowenfeld wrote that minority groups must necessarily be self-centered in their visual creations, "thus New Negro Art is not the art of visually minded people who feel as spectators. It is the art of people who feel involved in their own struggle."[211] Haptic art, then, was a method through which the self-centered and unique perspectives of minority groups could be realized. "The horizon of the sharecropper is his cornfield," Lowenfeld wrote, just as "the horizon of a laundry-woman [is] her tub."[212] These scenes or objects, under visually-minded art, would lack the specificity of experiencing such things.

Only disadvantaged people could attain such limited yet highly specific and original perspectives, a point which Lowenfeld articulated by connecting his own plight to that of African Americans. He wrote, "Whenever our freedom is restricted or gone, we become self-centered like the prisoner whose only outlook is the walls of his prison or the bars of his cell. I myself, being escaped from the claws of Hitler Germany, remember very well how my whole thinking and doing

[211] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", 7.
[212] Ibid.

became paralyzed when Hitler marched into Vienna, the city in which I lived, and the only thought I was capable of was centered around the idea of how to get out of this hell."[213] Thus the threat against his survival limited his perspective so that could only see what was most immediate. In the following examples of artwork by some of Lowenfeld's students at Hampton, much of the same language and thinking comes through visually. The pieces encompass haptic modes of art production, and their expressions are not stiff or objective but rather emotional and subjective. Each is also innately political in either its depiction of intolerable social conditions or proud renderings of cultural pasts.

Figure 3.2 Unknown artist, untitled, 1943-1945.[214]

[213] Ibid., 6.
[214] Unknown artist, untitled sketch, 1943-1945, Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library.

In the first sketch, figure 3.2, an African American woman's head is depicted as detached from the rest of her body; she seemingly floats in space.[215] The emphasized focus on just one part of her body reflects haptic traits of only recognizing that which is immediately present or concerning. The woman's expression is perhaps pained or tired, and her headscarf might suggest she is hard at work, possibly a domestic. The image could act in opposition to mammy stereotypes of African American women, particularly domestic workers with the same style of headscarf, as overly jovial, or nearly mindlessly subservient in her happiness to serve white families and children. The look of discontent upon this woman's face, and its subtle lines which display her age or exhaustion, defeat Southern white fantasies of happy-go-lucky, African American archetypes in favor of a far more distressing observation.

In this sense, the drawing is political and an extension of many Lowenfeldian philosophies regarding social hierarchies. In "Negro Art Expression," Lowenfeld remarked on how the feeling of subordination might be rendered emotionally through art: "Next to our superior [we feel] small ... unimportant in the world at large, important in our own circle; most important, perhaps, when we are quite alone."[216] The drawing resonates with several of these criteria in how the woman has been shrunk to only an isolated head, though on the parchment, it is relatively large and draws instant attention to itself.

[215] Ibid.
[216] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", 4.

Figure 3.3 Ivy Babb, untitled sketch, 1945.[217]

In the second example, figure 3.3, student Ivy Babb drew upon legacies of oppression to portray communal hardship. The drawing depicts a mass of either sharecroppers, apple pickers or slaves, but the precise details of their labor are irrelevant to the downtrodden emotions which fill the parchment. Lowenfeld's haptic principles of perspective are again apparent in the shading and vibrancy of the objects in the foreground, the nearest laborer and the tree, juxtaposed against the gradually receding, foggy background. Smaller details like the flowing, gangly nature of the tree's branches indicate an inclination for subjective expression as opposed to grounded reality. The natural environment in this piece is therefore rendered into an emotional expression, much in the same way Lowenfeld's earliest students were said to have depicted Hampton's landscape.

[217] Ivy Babb, untitled sketch, 1945, Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library.

Figure 3.4 John Biggers, *Dying Soldier*, 1942.[218]

In 1942, under Lowenfeld's guidance, Biggers began painting several murals on Hampton's campus. He had developed an instant affinity for his mentor, noting the basis for which the two could relate to one another: "Lowenfeld was familiar with Jewish persecution, and he was acquainted with the Negro's problem in this country. He taught us that art was a way for all people to speak. There is no censorship in art."[219] Certainly, art could be subjected to vilification and censorship, but under Lowenfeld's appreciation for art as a therapeutic process for the individual, Biggers' assertion was correct. Biggers enjoyed such liberty in the creation of his mural *Dying Soldier* (figure 3.4), which depicted an African American soldier caught in barbed wire.[220] The

[218] John Biggers, *Dying Soldier*, 1942, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library.
[219] John Biggers, quoted in "I've Hit My High: Dr. John Biggers moves in giant strides through classroom and museum," *The Houston Press*, 1968, Box 32, Folder 5, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
[220] John Biggers, *Dying Soldier*, 1942.

mural displays the soldier's thoughts during his final moments, including both joyous memories and histories of racial oppression. The piece is a thoughtful rumination on the sacrifices made by the soldier for a nation which contributed to him clear instances of pain which now flash before his eyes.

In questioning the need for patriotism in support of an oppressive society, Biggers' mural is politically combative; the barbed wire is not what kills him so much as the hypocrisy of the American nation defeating fascism overseas but upholding such atrocities at home. Lowenfeld later commented on the mural, "Most startling in his mural is the concept of the representation of how thoughts integrate … how reality mingles with the imagination, how the flood rises into the clouds, and how the roaring planes sweep over the soldier's head."[221] As a visually eclectic work, *Dying Soldier* was the kind of Expressionist statement of one's identity and social status that Lowenfeld had always encouraged. Bigger's incredible progress as a novice artist in such a short span of time, in combination with the art program's favorable reputation throughout American art circles, were conditions which allowed for several students to publicize their art to larger audiences. In late 1942, Lowenfeld was invited to manage an exhibition of his students' work, *Young Negro Art*, at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Only seventeen students were permitted to have their work shown in the exhibit. Biggers' *Dying Soldier* would be among them. Lewis was not selected, perhaps as a result of her initial disputes with Lowenfeld, or simply because she was a fairly recent transfer student.[222] By the fall of 1943, those chosen to present their work landed in the very city where Lowenfeld first began his emigration experience.

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[221] Viktor Lowenfeld, promotional material for mural presentation, 1946, Box 19, Folder 4, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

[222] In her interviews, Lewis did not remark on the MoMA exhibit nor did she allude to not being chosen for opportunities. Nevertheless, playwright Jacqueline Lawton's *The Hampton Years*, which depicted Lowenfeld's relationships with students including both Biggers and Lewis, contains a scene in which the latter cries in response to being snubbed for this event.

The Nature of Imitation: Hampton Goes to New York

In October 1943, Lowenfeld took his students to 53rd Street in New York, to the institution where secretary Alma Latour had relieved him of his struggle to find employment. When they presented their assemblage of paintings, sketches, sculptures and murals as part of *Young Negro Art: An Exhibition of the Work of Students at Hampton Institute*, they enjoyed the opportunity to share expressions of themselves, their familial and ancestral backgrounds and their interpretations of contemporary racial and gender politics. Yet press materials in anticipation of the exhibit revealed the challenges to their artistry they would face, as white commenters characterize African American artistic expression as potentially imitative, or otherwise exotic. Victor d'Amico, head of the educational program at MoMA and who had become one of Lowenfeld's first American supporters, stated that "the Negro possesses a rich creative power which is at times highly individual and sensitive. He is imaginative and responsive when properly guided and encouraged, but can easily become inhibited and imitative under inflexible and formal teaching."[223] The comment was patronizing in its assertion of immense talent which could only be brought out through proper instruction, that of Lowenfeld's. He continued, "There are few teachers who truly understand the Negro's profound creative ability and who are capable of instructing him without destroying or at least perverting his visual perception and his instinctive talent. The same may be said about teaching white students, but it is more applicable to the Negro because he is more malleable and sensitive, and therefore more easily influenced."[224]

Such commentary reinforced many ideas behind slave culture and the noble savage, who stood out as remarkable for his or her resistance to corrupting modernity, but whose innocence

[223] Press Release, *Museum of Modern Art*, 1943, Box 1, Folder 41, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, 1.
[224] Ibid., 3.

needed to be protected. Equally prevalent was the theory that the white man could uplift African American artists to respectable standards, as d'Amico pointed to the "creative potentiality of the American Negro," as if to suggest the full potential had not been met.[225] Behind these sentiments which presented Hampton students as diamonds in the rough was praise for Lowenfeld's work: "[He] is a teacher who understands and is able to draw out the creative gifts of the Negro. The exhibition illustrates his power to do so and is a commendable effort."[226] The choice to characterize the exhibit as exemplary of Lowenfeld's power indicated a lack of respect for the artists themselves. No admiration was reserved for their individual works, and the entire exhibit was judged through the teacher's ability to pull out their creativity. Yet Lowenfeld also received criticism, as d'Amico stated, "[The exhibition] represents, however, only the beginning of a complex and difficult problem. There are indications in the exhibition of the struggle of the Hampton student in finding his own expression as opposed to imitating the traditional schools of art and contemporary artists."[227] The students were further accused of demonstrating too much influence "from a European school or a favorite master in the painting," although "this should eventually disappear as the student gains confidence and the ability to express his own ideas."[228] Altogether, the exhibit was "more important as an indication" of creative potential, not an outright example of artistic genius.[229] In decrying the apparent European influences in the work, d'Amico suggested that the art was not genuinely original, even though it had actually fused Expressionist styles and African or African American imagery together. Lowenfeld would have disagreed with his statement, for Expressionism was a universal means of creative expression. The tropes and

[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.

flourishes recalling a cultural heritage and past were in fact original and subjective inclusions which asserted the individual identities of the artists. The need for African American art to eschew all European originated aesthetic trends supported ideas of the pure, untainted and exotic caricature which earlier supporters of the Hampton Institute had cherished.

Lowenfeld's own rhetoric supported the need to liberate African American artistry from overwhelming Eurocentrism, but his statements about the *Young Negro Art* exhibit indicated that he felt his students had already succeeded. He noted that his students had "developed rapidly in an almost unbelievable fashion" their abilities to forego inhibitions and avoid any imitative urges.[230] He also emphasized that "their first conscious approaches toward art" had come from American fashion magazines, which led them to "draw white persons and not Negro features."[231] This observation recalls Biggers' childhood impressions of white pin-up drawings which threatened to warp his view of feminine beauty standards. Despite these early encounters, the work of Lowenfeld's students, as seen in figure 3.2, plainly demonstrated the abandonment of white features in favor of authentic representations. Lowenfeld believed as much given his commentary on the rapid development of his students, and the sculptures he had included as part of the exhibit which were blatant expressions of African or African American bodies and faces, certainly detached from white sculpted figures. The response to Biggers' *Dying Soldier* particularly revealed a diversion in opinion between white-dominant art circles and Lowenfeld on matters of political protest. In a review of the exhibit, *Art News* blasted the collective work of the students as "a form of race and social consciousness utterly incompatible with sincere artistic expression," but Biggers' mural was especially cast as "screaming propaganda" due to its heavy-handedness.[232]

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[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Newspaper clippings, *Art News*, 1943, Box 1, Folder 41, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

The works were so blatantly political in content, and such striking articulations of social strife, that audiences found the exhibit exaggerated, unsubtle and tacky. Such a negative reception could be explained through discomfort with both African American assertions of an unjust society and Expressionist styles as a whole, through which emotionally charged depictions of life were common. The invective lodged at the exhibit was discouraging to students who had otherwise been excited to step into a professional venue for art consumption and criticism. This was, however, the reality which faced African American artists, especially those coming from the South, given they were perceived as the least cultivated but purest examples of their race. Interpretations of their work which invoked such exoticism allowed their artistry to be examined only through comparisons to European art, as if white critics were searching for signs of sheer ingenuity rather than the social implications of the pieces. For Lowenfeld, however, the work of his students had met his standards of necessary self-centeredness, which perhaps contributed to their so-called exaggerated depictions of racial and social consciousness. The exhibit had earned its place in a museum space, especially one dedicated to modern art. As Lowenfeld later wrote, the "emotional relationship to the world" felt by minority groups is what made modernist expressions akin to "salvation."[233]

Holocaust Consciousness and the Post-Hampton Years

In asking his students to create art which reflected societal inequities, Lowenfeld attempted to use his particular trauma of antisemitism into understanding the racial conditions of the Jim Crow South. The grim depictions of downtrodden or disadvantaged individuals in the works of Hampton students were innately political expressions in their resistance to white nostalgic imaginings about the Southern past. Similarly, the Hebraic scenes which Lowenfeld instructed

[233] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Negro Art Expression", 8.

Jewish youths to create in Austria established their communal heritage during times of strife and antisemitic caricaturization. Yet neither Lowenfeld nor any of his students could have anticipated the full destruction caused by the Holocaust or the sheer number of Jews killed. While its images shocked Lowenfeld, his awareness of the event further energized his teaching philosophies, helped sustain his Jewish identity and even entered the visual rhetoric of his students' work. Biggers remembered that one evening, Lowenfeld had extended to him a dinner invitation after an unusually long day of work in the campus' art studio.[234] During their drive, Lowenfeld decided to stop at the post office, and upon exiting, "he was ghostly white. And he didn't say one word. He got in the car and he drove, but he stopped there near the water's edge and he pulled the letter out and read it to me. He had gotten it from the State Department. And in this letter, they were telling him of some of his folks that they had discovered were burned in those camps."[235] In most relationships between Jewish refugee scholars and their African American students, any discussion of Holocaust persecution was rare. Gabrielle Simon Edgecomb has understood this silence as the assumption that strangers would not understand the "other" world, leaving them to internalize their suffering or confine it to their immediate, Jewish or white communities.[236]

Lowenfeld was unique in his clarity and willingness to discuss his trauma. Biggers continued the anecdote, remarking, "Now this was one of the most horrendous experiences I've ever had because a human being was telling me that his family -- and he named them -- were victims; they had been burned … I had heard of neighbors whose -- members of their families had been lynched. But I realized that race and color might not have any meaning at all when it comes

[234] Interview transcript, John Biggers interview with Christia Adair, n.d., Box 60, Folder 5, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, n.p.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, 78.

to terrifying experiences in this world."[237] Through this sentiment, Biggers had acknowledged that his relationship with Lowenfeld "had truly crossed all country and racial barriers -- those barriers were crossed now. That was no longer a part of the struggle."[238] Learning about the Holocaust had allowed Biggers to negotiate with hesitations he might have had about working with an Austrian Jew, whose eccentric disposition initially puzzled him. In the moments after learning of his family's fate, Lowenfeld again turned to Biggers and said, "they aren't killing you, they segregate you, they discriminate, but they aren't killing you for being Black."[239] Racial violence in the United States was in fact deadly, but Lowenfeld's frustration at the actions of the Nazis had temporarily made the strife of his students seem light by comparison. The ultimate effect of the Holocaust on the dynamic between Lowenfeld and his students was the maintenance of a bond rooted in mutual empathy for each other's persecution. Biggers had determined that this shared knowledge solidified both their personal and working relationships.

With the knowledge of Nazi concentration camps becoming publicized, Lowenfeld slightly shifted his teaching practices to be more structured and purposeful. He later wrote, "it is not merely enough to promote creativity, for we have witnessed during our lives how creativity could be misused. The ingenious methods which were invented for the killing and torturing of millions in the concentration camps of Germany are only some of the dreadful examples."[240] Art education needed to be constructive, guided by moral intentions and the fight for a just and rational society.

Though the work exhibited in *Young Negro Art* at MoMA had already been labelled too unsubtle, the moral imperatives of art felt after the Holocaust made the works of Hampton students

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[237] Interview transcript, John Biggers interview with Christia Adair, n.p.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Viktor Lowenfeld, "Basic Aspects of Creative Teaching," n.d. Box 1, Folder 41, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA, 3.

more obviously violent. The postwar sketch in figure 3.5 by Ivy Babb is reminiscent of Holocaust imagery, with two men, perhaps in striped clothing, struggling to carry a corpse in some ambiguous space. The image's bleakness in combination with its scarcity of scenic details makes it a provocative example of haptic art. The 1945 sketch in figure 3.6 by an unknown Hampton artist depicts miserable, bald figures in cramped conditions, with a number of sharp lines drawn across their faces as if to indicate they are in a situation of immense strife. The timing of these sketches combined with the students' knowledge of Lowenfeld's Austrian-Jewish roots make it plausible that the Holocaust impacted the creative content of Hampton's art program. The sketches can also be reasonably associated with scenes of African or African American oppression, perhaps as depictions of slavery or the Middle Passage, respectively. The universal applicability of these pieces to either moments of historical Jewish or African American persecution reinforce the idea that the two groups, within the collaborative and creative space that was Hampton, were able to establish cultural empathy through creative expression.

Figure 3.5 Ivy Babb, untitled sketch, 1945.[241]

[241] Ivy Babb, untitled sketch, 1945, Box 18, Folder 40, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

Figure 3.6 Unknown artist, untitled sketch, 1945.[242]

In 1946, Lowenfeld was offered a position as head of the art department at Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania. His reputation as an innovative art educator who had done projects with African American students meant that hiring opportunities outside of the HBCU system had considerably opened up. The beginning salary at Penn State was enticing enough to Lowenfeld that he accepted the offer to make the transition in the fall semester of 1946.[243] Little is known about Lowenfeld's decision other than the salary increase, but his continued interests in speaking engagements and events concerning African American artistry suggested his time at the Hampton Institute was not merely a passing fad in his personal or professional life. Lowenfeld also did not arrive to Penn State by himself: John Biggers, after graduating from Hampton, decided to pursue a master's degree in art education in the same year as Lowenfeld's hiring.[244]

The transition for Biggers from Hampton to the predominantly white Penn State was isolating and demoralizing, as he struggled to find a community of his own and was struck by the

[242] Unknown artist, untitled sketch, 1945, Box 18, Folder 40, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.
[243] Viktor Lowenfeld, letter to hiring committee, 1946, Box 3, Folder 8, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.
[244] Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, corrected proofs*, n.p.

poverty of northern ghettos of nearby Pittsburgh. The "scarce food, substandard housing, and rampant unemployment" he witnessed among urban African American communities appalled him, yet such scenes and his feeling of displacement upon moving reaffirmed his specific Southern and Black identity.[245] Biggers spent much of his time in the company of Lowenfeld and his wife Gretel, and the only friendships he was able to acquire within his own age group were with Jewish students, whom he called intellectuals.[246] Lewis went on to pursue a graduate degree in art history at The Ohio State University in 1951, and she similarly found commonalities with Jewish students. "[The 1950s] was a period where you had cooperation between the African Americans and the Jews, who came together as a force to make things better," Lewis recalled, "I think the healthy that came out of that [period] was that collaboration and that kind of brotherhood, sisterhood that resulted."[247] The exclusion of Jews and African Americans from the top of the American racial hierarchy, along with their histories of persecution, meant the basis for a political alliance had been formed.

Yet even in their earliest alliances, complexities abound. Lewis' characterization of Jewish and African American relationships as brotherhoods or sisterhoods was in contrast to the father-son dynamic Lowenfeld established with Biggers. After Biggers earned a doctoral degree from Penn State in 1954, he joined the faculty of the art department at Houston's Texas State University (now Texas Southern), where Joe Mack, another Hampton alum, had been teaching. In 1958, Lowenfeld sent an inquiry to Biggers as to Mack's well-being. Lowenfeld and Biggers maintained consistent correspondence, but engaged in what was perhaps their first conflict over this question. Biggers wrote to his mentor, "I feel that speaking frankly to you can harm no one, because Joe and

[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Interview transcript, "Interview with Samella Lewis, Tape #3" 1993, Box 66, Folder 7, Samella S. Lewis Papers (1132), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, p. 8.

I started the struggle and search for racial and universal identification under your leadership almost eighteen years ago."[248] On the character of Joe Mack, Biggers certainly was frank: "It is well known to you, Viktor, as well as it is known to the Negro people in general, that in many cases individuals perform with eloquence and sensitivity in the presence of the 'Master,' but become an arrogant beast among his own people … Joe Mack [has spoken] openly of his disrespect and dislike for Texas State University and against some of us in the art department. His position was that 'n****** were not dependable, subjective, and [were] incompetent to perform as educators.'"[249] Biggers went on to claim that Mack had not been actively creating art, which hindered his ability to sensitively connect with students, a Lowenfeldian tenet of art education. The letter indicated no clear purpose for the invective against Mack, as the man had left the university for another anyhow. Biggers might have found that in his relationship with Lowenfeld, venting such personal frustrations would be appropriate. Yet the letter left Lowenfeld disheartened.

In his reply, Lowenfeld wrote, "Now, John, let's sit down and look at each other eye to eye. These are not the words which you would normally use and I am disappointed. I am further disappointed that instead of using a time when you could have a personal discussion with Joe, you wrote me such a letter. This is unfair and against all good professional practices."[250] Lowenfeld further accused Biggers of acting without sincerity, and wondered if he had written the letter under certain influences, as if to imply alcohol. Strains of paternalistic concern permeate Lowenfeld's letter, and his scolding attitude seemed to have shut down discussion of the issue. Biggers' problems with Mack, though, were not trivial workplace disputes, as they instead stemmed from

[248] John Biggers, letter to Viktor Lowenfeld, Dec. 10 1958, Box 28, Folder 15, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Viktor Lowenfeld, letter to John Biggers, Dec. 15, 1958, Box 28, Folder 15, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

inappropriate racial rhetoric which contained toxic ideas about the place of African Americans in art. Lowenfeld's refusal to engage in such intensely political matters revealed the limitations of his collaborative dynamic with Biggers. His primary concern was to foster unity between the two African American artists, like a father fixing his sons' quarrel, without attention to the nuances of the issue.

In the case of Lowenfeld and Biggers, then, their alliance and friendship was founded on common upbringings and histories of racial oppression, but its particular mentor-mentee nature left a certain imbalance in power and freedom to control their discourses. Nevertheless, the exchanges and learning that occurred at the Hampton Institute continued to follow Lowenfeld, Biggers and Lewis throughout their professional careers. Both Biggers and Lewis became distinguished professors of art and art history. Biggers remained at Texas State, where he ascended to the role of department chair, while Lewis taught at several universities, most notably at Florida A&M University where she also chaired the art department. Lowenfeld's impact can be observed in their works and philosophies pertaining to art.

In Biggers' doctoral dissertation, the mural entitled "The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education," seen in figure 3.7, Lowenfeld's influence is unmissable. The piece is a lesson in Expressionism with its jumbled nature and the emotional, oddly shaped body language of its figures. It recalls heritage and community, with politically charged implications about the essentiality of Black women to society, a statement which derived from his youth. Some figures even appear Hebraic, like characters from the Hebrew Bible, an interpretation supported by art historian Milly Heyd who believes Biggers' work often "alludes to the Jewish experience."[251]

[251] Milly Heyd, *Mutual Reflections: Jews and Blacks in American Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 209.

Figure 3.7 John Biggers, *The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education*, 1953.[252]

Lewis herself became a strong proponent of incorporating African symbols and tropes into African American artistic expressions, a major departure from her original feeling of embarrassment regarding such aesthetics. She and Biggers both took frequent trips to Africa throughout their professional careers, and her affection for tribal cultures allowed her to express diasporic unity in her art and teaching. "The need is not to return to Africa," she later wrote, but to achieve "significant representation of the great art producing tribes of Africa" in larger collections and considerations of African American artistry.[253] While their interests in the African diaspora coincided with African American political movements, the parallels to Lowenfeld's teaching philosophies are plain to see. Lowenfeld encouraged his students to embrace cultural pasts as a means of solidifying their community and achieving self-realization. Though African cultures had been rendered undesirable to Eurocentric perceptions of high art, through their work at the Hampton Institute both Biggers and Lewis claimed such aesthetic flairs as part of their

[252] John Biggers, *The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education*, 1953, Box 15, Folder 8, John Biggers Papers (1179), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
[253] Samella Lewis, "African/African American Art" n.d., Box 66, Folder 8, Samella S. Lewis Papers (1132), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, 6.

artistic identities. Lowenfeld followed the same trajectory himself throughout his tenure at Penn State, where he remained invested in the activities of Hillel, the collegiate Jewish organization.

Figure 3.8 Antoinieta Terrazas Maluenda and Viktor Lowenfeld, *The Ideals of Judaism*, 1954.[254]

In 1954, he collaborated with a doctoral student on a mural, "The Ideals of Judaism," that depicted scenes of Jewish life and culture, seen partially in figure 3.8. Recalling his earlier years of instructing Jewish youths in Austria, the mural reveals that Lowenfeld had never abandoned his fantasies of Jewish community unification. It is less fantastical than his previously imagined Wyckfohr, the island commune where Jewish youths could live without supervision, but Wyckfohr's theme of camaraderie rooted in group consciousness appeared to still resonate with Lowenfeld based on the mural's scene.

In early April of 1960, Viktor Lowenfeld suffered a sudden heart attack during a faculty meeting at Penn State, dying shortly thereafter. His widow, Gretel, spent the next two decades

[254] Antoinieta Terrazas Maluenda and Viktor Lowenfeld, *The Ideals of Judaism*, 1954, Box 18, Folder 40, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

working to have his most famous works, *The Nature of Creative Activity* and *Creative and Mental Growth* translated into numerous languages. She and their son, John, who went on to become a psychologist, took an active interest in protecting the legacy of his pedagogical philosophies, writing several letters of clarification on Lowenfeld's behalf, should an editor have ever misinterpreted his teachings.[255] These teaching practices, with their concentration on the societal benefits of therapeutic art processes, produced an altogether inclusive platform for creative expression. Though under intolerant societies the artistry of Jews had been vilified, and the artistry of the blind ridiculed and question, and the artistry of African Americans patronized, Lowenfeld and his students presented a creative process which worked to uplift and spiritually sustain such marginalized groups.

[255] Margaret Lowenfeld, correspondences with MacMillan Publishing, 1960-1980, Box 3, Folder 10, Viktor Lowenfeld Papers (587), Pennsylvania State University Archives, Special Collections Library, State College, PA.

CONCLUSION:

"All Art Is Realistic"

In an unpublished essay, Samella Lewis wrote that "all art is realistic," for each artist develops her or his own symbolic codes which carry some social meaning.[256] The art produced in the Hampton Institute under the tutelage of Viktor Lowenfeld certainly proves this statement to be correct. With Lowenfeld, these artists reconstructed both highly personal and communal legacies of oppression, and in doing so, reclaimed their heritage so that it could not be denigrated. Lowenfeld himself underwent the same process. As a Jewish youth, adolescent and adult in Austria, he used creative expression to express political discontent and challenge societal norms that were grounded in bigotry. As a Jewish refugee, he relied on the power of creativity to foster alliances and friendships, and to develop a universal language of expression which was founded on shared empathy between marginalized groups. These narratives converged to demonstrate that the historical dynamic between Jews and African Americans should be expanded to include artistic, pedagogical and transnational frameworks. Through such angles of analysis, more evidence of cultural exchange connecting the two groups and their respective histories of persecutions has emerged. While past scholars on the subject of Jewish and African American relations have relied almost exclusively on economic and social factors, as well as solidly organized political activities, this study proposes that the artwork of Hampton is itself political. Lowenfeld's experiences as a Jew in Europe informed his politics, which in turn impacted his teaching practices at Hampton. The relationship he held with students like Lewis and John T.

[256] Samella Lewis, notes and drafts, n.d., Box 62, Folder 2, Samella S. Lewis Papers (1132), Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia, n.p.

Biggers indicated the unique opportunities for artistic collaboration between these specific groups, as well as the complexities and limitations behind white and Black power dynamics.

This study first concerned the intellectual issues of Vienna, where Lowenfeld had grown up at the turn of the century. The early frustrations in his life, stemming from wartime poverty and rising antisemitism, led him toward creative expression and teaching which promoted Jewish group consciousness. These goals coincided with his Zionist politics, as did his specific philosophies on the types of art which should be produced. Fascism, for Lowenfeld, could be identified in art through a sameness of expression which discouraged individuals from representing their inner selves. If Jews and, early in his career, the blind could reach into their greatest emotional depths, their artistry would be akin to political liberation, especially if what was expressed constituted group unity. Such theories were also tantamount to political resistance in a cultural landscape which vilified Jewry as well as modern art. Lowenfeld's insistence throughout his Viennese career on Jewish consciousness and solidarity should be viewed as a refutation against racial intolerance, as well as a rejection of Austro-German culture's imposition of anti-Jewish tropes.

Bringing these philosophies over to the United States, and especially the Hampton Institute, was not an easy task. This study has shown the consistent attempts to stifle and denigrate African Americans' attempts to achieve such political and even aesthetic liberation. Even during the school's gradual path toward liberalized educational policies, white audiences could only imagine Black artistry through racist stereotypes. Thus, a large element of Lowenfeld's teaching platform changed to include the dismantling of racial stereotypes, and reclamations of cultural pasts which had been ridiculed, mocked or otherwise mishandled by dominant societal forces. This was true for both Jews and African Americans as both were turned into caricatures in art they did not

control, and their artistry was vilified as imitative or degenerate. Through this narrative of artistic and cultural reclamation, this study has challenged scholarship that trends toward pessimistic views of Jewish and African American relations. While Lowenfeld's story at Hampton contained complexities and complications, his overall role was that of a genuine ally who depended on common experiences of persecution to forge politically productive art.

Lowenfeld's theory of haptic art stemmed from his understanding that marginalized groups were limited in spatial perspective, as a result of their social and hierarchical positionalities. Haptic artists were concerned with the immediate, and these theories showed themselves clearly in the artwork of Lowenfeld's students. The art performed by Hampton's students invoked not only Lowenfeld's preferences for subjective expression, but also Holocaust imagery once its totality had been realized. This exchange proved that a culture of shared empathy among Jews and African Americans had emerged in response to each group's persecution. Furthermore, Lowenfeld's insistence on relaying his experiences under the Nazis to students, and his remarks on the fascist potentialities of creative expression, works as an example of Holocaust consciousness among Jews in the United States. Scholars interested in the development of a minority consciousness among both Jews and African Americans should turn to artistic cases like this for evidence of a shared cultural and visual language through which their hardships have been expressed. The presence of the Holocaust in the work of Lowenfeld's students also suggested his incomplete assimilation into American society, although scholars like Hasia Diner have proposed that Jewish interests in African American politics was akin to integration attempts. Instead, this study has proposed that Lowenfeld's Jewishness strongly informed his teaching practices and philosophies, and consequently infiltrated the visual rhetoric of his students.

Yet this narrative has also shown the limitations behind Jewish and African American relations in artistic and educational spaces. Lowenfeld pushed his theories, with their very clear roots in his Austro-German upbringing, while denouncing the pervasive influence of Western concepts on African American artistry. In being forceful with his own practices, he encountered some challenges from students like Lewis who resisted instruction in free art expression. Regardless, Lewis and all of the Hampton artists embraced Expressionist aesthetics and fused them together with the symbolic African tropes Lowenfeld had been promoting. In doing so, they participated in a movement of self-realization and the affirmation of identity, which Lowenfeld himself had gone through and encouraged in Jewish youths. The paternalistic nature which Lowenfeld adopted toward Biggers might reasonably be viewed as a mere reflection of their mentor-mentee dynamic. But Lowenfeld's later indifference to Biggers' concerns over inflammatory racial discourse with another artist renders this element of their relationship ambiguous. If Lowenfeld was fully paternalistic, it may somewhat characterize this entire narrative as a story of a white man uplifting African Americans. The real truth is more nuanced, for as much as Lowenfeld helped his students articulate their emotional states, they helped reinforce his own Jewish identity. Lowenfeld's immersion in a space which was inclined toward politically-minded unity allowed him to remember his own position and heritage as a Jew. Had he been placed elsewhere to teach, it is possible Lowenfeld would have identified more strongly with white America and less as a minority.

In 2013, playwright Jacqueline Lawton wrote "The Hampton Years," for the Virginia Stage Company, based on the interactions between Lowenfeld and some of his Hampton students, including Biggers and Lewis. The play came about after Lawton discovered a number of inspirational quotations by Biggers, whose willingness to speak about Lowenfeld never weakened

before his death in 2001. On her decision to write the play, Lawton said, "the Black and Jewish relationship is deep and complex. We have danced, prayed and wept together. We have marched arm-in-arm demanding equality, justice, and civil rights. We have fought against one another, standing at arm's length in hatred, mistrust and confusion. I look forward to a time of healing in our respective communities and hope that this play can contribute to that process."[257] That a dramatic play was written about relatively obscure figures reveals the richness behind their collective narrative. The spirit of healing through art which Lawton speaks of permeated the life, art and practices of Viktor Lowenfeld as well as his students. For Lowenfeld, the production of art was therapeutic and lent itself to spiritual realizations about one's self, one's community and one's society. For Jews and African Americans especially, creating art through emotional clarity about both the past and the present presented opportunities for healing, affirmation, and connectedness. The artistic and ultimately political works of Lowenfeld and his Hampton students have affirmed such convictions and have helped recast the historical dynamic between Jews and African Americans as one bounded by complexities even in artistic and pedagogical relationships.

[257] Crystal A. Degregory, "Jacqueline E. Lawton's 'The Hampton Years' Features HBCU Artists," *HBCUStory* (blog), May 15 2013, https://hbcustory.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/jacqueline-e-lawtons-the-hampton-yearsfeatures-hbcu-artists-biggers-and-lewis/

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