Humans or Horrors: An Examination of the Validity of Contemporary Western Culture’s Images of Judas Iscariot, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin Against the Historical Record

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Abstract

Western culture has always had a penchant for glorifying its heroes and demonizing its villains. From Benedict Arnold, Attila the Hun, and Benito Mussolini, the West has found ways to make its villains into champions of evil, devoid of all human qualities, and reduced the character of these foes down to its most basic (and memorable) parts.

This paper attempts to explain why this reduction has become so prevalent in the Western mind, and examines the histories of three of the West’s greatest bad men: Judas, Hitler, and Stalin, then compares this trio’s historical records against what they are remembered for. By comparing modern perceptions of these figures, through the use of memes, contemporary literature sources, and popularity within the mainstream discourse to primary historical documents, a better, more complete picture can be painted for each.

In this way, this paper serves not to simply explain the reasons for why Judas, Hitler, and Stalin are remembered in the manner they are, but instead provides alternative avenues through which to examine the lives of these three men to better understand not the popular perception of the three, but instead a more historically accurate representation of them.
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Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Acknowledgements 2

Introduction 4

Judas Iscariot: The Most Important of the Disciples? 6

Adolf Hitler: Beyond the History Channel 19

Joseph Stalin: The Unremembered Tyrant 31

Conclusion 42

Bibliography 44
Introduction

Western Culture has long had a fascination with the competition between good and evil, of “our” team versus “their” team. Our political leaders look to find a “just war doctrine” in order to pursue military action against evil dictators. Our cinemas are filled with blockbusters such as Star Wars and Lord of the Rings, movies which revolve entirely around the competition between the forces of good and of evil. These films project the idea of a villain bred to be bad: Lord of the Rings features the dark lord Sauron, a faceless, ever-present danger lying in wait to topple the world. In addition, the Tolkien trilogy features Saruman, the one-time friend of Gandalf, who ultimately betrays his ally and the cause of man. The same is also true of Star Wars. Darth Vader exists as a wholly malignant force within the universe, bent on bowing every knee to his empire. At the same time, Lucas’ films also give us the character of Lando Calrissian, who betrays Luke and his posse to Vader’s forces after promising them a safe haven. This narrative plays itself out time and time again in Western Culture, and has moved out of the realm of recreational art and fantasy and inserted itself into our understanding of history.

What is interesting about the West’s obsession with the split forces of good and evil is that while we champion one and revile the other, we erect monuments to the memorable of both. For the moral champions of the West’s psyche, we have built literal monuments, from the Lincoln Memorial to the Arc de Triomphe. It has become commonplace for the great heroes of the West’s history to become immortalized in stone or art. Take the Vatican or Westminster Abbey, where the likenesses of Christ, Shakespeare, King Henry, and King David have all been given marble tributes. For its villains, however, the West has given a much more practical immortalization—language. From Judas to Benedict Arnold, Hitler to Brutus, these names have all been adopted as bywords for “traitor,” “demon,” and more generally, “evil.” However, this
incorporation into language as a symbol for some wider idea causes these historical figures to become reduced down to nothing more than what the connotation of their name explains them to be.

This study will examine the validity of the modern popular perceptions of three of Western culture’s greatest villains—Judas Iscariot, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Stalin—and use these examinations to show the numerous disparities between these perceptions and the historical record, through the use of primary sources and academic analyses juxtaposed against the popular use of these figures’ names and connotations in everyday Western society, in everything from film to Facebook. What this paper will not accomplish, however, is to advance any kind of positive or apologist light on the very real, and very evil deeds of these men. The goal of this examination is to present these historical characters in their entirety, rather than the definition that popular usage and understanding has given their names.

For the sake of consistency and flow, these case studies will be approached chronologically. The historical reception of Judas Iscariot will be the first interpretation we will attempt to decipher and understand more completely. Though Judas no longer occupies the central archetypical idea of “betrayal” in Western Culture as much as he did a mere century ago, likely replaced by more contemporary dictators, like Hitler, Pol Pot and Idi Amin, it is important to understand how he acquired this designation, and if the historical record actually backs up his popular image.
Judas Iscariot: The Most Important of the Disciples?

From Dante Alighieri and his fellow Renaissance poets to a large majority of contemporary Protestant and Catholic theologians, Judas has long served as the paradigm of what a Christian should strive to never become. With Dante, we see a very bleak outlook for those who betray not only their masters, but in the case of Judas, who betrayed the Son of God:

"Thereby Cocytus wholly was congealed/ With six eyes he did weep, and down three chins/ Trickled the tear-drops and the blood drivel./ At every mouth he with his teeth was crunching/ A sinner, in the manner of a brake,/ so that he three of them tormented thus./ To him in front of the biting was as naught/ Unto the clawing, for sometimes the spine/ Utterly stripped of all the skin remained. "That soul up there which has the greatest pain, /" The Master said, 'is Judas Iscariot."

This excerpt from *The Inferno*, shows the importance of placing Judas at the nadir of pain during his sentence in Hell. His flesh is ripped and savaged from his bones. He exists in a cycle of being digested or being frozen—since the innermost circle of Hell is so far away from the light of the sun and God that there is nothing but ice and snow, representing the cold and calculating sins that each of the punished committed.

However, modern biblical scholarship holds an equally damning and unforgiving, though significantly less macabre, view of the character of Judas. Some go so far as to say that Judas was never truly a believer or an active disciple, but instead tagged along with The Twelve on the basis of a profit motive—since Judas was in charge of the disciples’ coffers, he could skim some off the top for himself, an act he was accused of in the Gospel of John. While this petty thievery

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does little to prove how Judas Iscariot was a cold-blooded murderer of the Savior of Mankind, it is a simple enough anecdote to reinforce the traditional view of Judas.

However, do the biblical and historical facts concerning Judas’ treachery to Christ actually stand up to Western Culture’s personification as the ultimate case of betrayal, fratricide, and evil? We can begin to better explain and understand the actions of Judas by looking at the entirety of his career as a follower of Jesus, instead of the truncated story from the betrayal at the Last Supper to Judas’ suicide.

Judas Iscariot began his path down the road to the crucifixion in a rather quiet manner. In all four accounts of the calling of the disciples, Judas is always mentioned either as a footnote, or simply is not present in the record. What we do know is that Jesus knew all of the disciples he called before he ever personally interacted with them. Considering that Jesus was also divine, we must assume that he retained his power of omniscience, and thus knew what Judas would be capable of, and ultimately would, do.

What further distinguishes Judas from the other eleven disciples is his heritage. Peter, John, Mark, Matthew, and the rest were all of Galilean descent. Judas’ surname, “Iscariot” betrays his extra-Galilean roots, as Iscariot, a Hebrew translation of the Greek name “Iskariote” (Ἰσκαριώτης), means literally “Men of Kerioth.” While the other eleven disciples came from Galilean locations, Judas’ hometown of Kerioth sat far to the south—about 10 miles below Hebron. This alone makes Judas stand out from the other disciples, as he is fundamentally different in a group of men all from the rural reaches of Judea. What is further interesting about the selection of Judas is the flurry of name changes that Jesus assigns to some of the new

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4 Revelation 1:8.
followers. The most notable of these is Simon becoming Peter, who Jesus says shall be "the rock [Jesus] builds his church on."6 Judas, however, receives no such name change. This would not be overly significant (since many disciples retained their birth names), with the exception of two key points. The first is that, as mentioned before, Jesus was aware of his new followers’ natures, and the second that Judas is a Greek corruption of the Hebrew רְדָם, "Judah," which means praise.7 This creates an interesting dichotomy between how Jesus does not change the name of the man who, when he is tapped to be an apostle, is immediately branded as "[the one] who would betray him,"8 yet Christ sees fit to let him retain his positive and laudable name.

As the gospels continue through the period of Jesus’ ministry, Judas falls to the wayside, occupying what a number of theologians refer to as the “Third Circle” of disciples, or the ring of followers most distant from Jesus in terms of relationships. Most of the Gospels’ narrative structures center around the storylines of the “Inner Circle” of disciples, or those closest to Christ: John, Peter, and James.9 This is a very interesting development in the Gospel story, for though Peter would go on to found the early Christian church, it would be ill advised to say that the missionary work of John and James constituted a more profound influence on the course of Christianity than the actions of Judas leading up to the crucifixion. But before we come to the whirlwind of events that surround the disciples from the Last Supper through the Ascension of Christ, it is pertinent to compare the actions of Judas during the high water mark of Christ’s personal ministry against those of Judas’ fellow disciples. As stated earlier, the book of John points out quite keenly that Judas was known, on at least one occasion, to have stolen money

6 Matthew 16:18.
7 Thompson, Study Bible, Concordance.
8 Mark 3:19.
from the disciples' treasury, which he had been charged with managing. On one occasion, it was assumed that when Christ allowed Mary Magdalene to anoint him with expensive perfume and Judas objected, that Judas hoped to sell the oil in question for a small personal profit. This theft, however, is the only recorded sin that Judas committed during his tenure with Christ, and recounted only by John. While this may seem rather irrelevant at first, when we look at some of The Twelve closer to Jesus, we see many instances of much more severe transgressions against Christ. With Peter, one of Jesus' most trusted disciples, we see first fear and unfaithfulness when Jesus, walking on water, asks for Peter to walk out to him. Though Jesus promises his safety, Peter still lacks faith, begins to sink, and is saved only by Jesus lifting him out of the waves. Peter again commits a transgression when at the Last Supper, he leads a debate over which disciple was considered to be the greatest among them, displaying an obvious lust for power and prestige in a post-Jesus world. Finally, in one of his most well-documented missteps, Peter claims that he would never desert his Lord. Jesus retorts that not only would Peter deny Him three times before morning, he would flee Christ at the crucifixion; regardless of his intentions, Peter promptly fulfills all aspects of Jesus’ predictions. The other members do not fare much better in this allegiance to Christ, as they all scattered after the encounter with the Pharisees at the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas, however, remains with Jesus for the majority of his show trial before the local religious court, called the Sanhedrin. When the court finds Jesus guilty, and sentences him to death, Judas, the only remaining disciple, is filled with remorse and regret and flees to find forgiveness. In short, we see in Judas a man who could see the bigger

10 John 12: 1-6.  
picture, as well as a loyal and less power-hungry disciple than those Jesus drew into his inner circle.

As we move from the disciples during the ministry period of Christ’s life to the interim period lasting from the Last Supper through the crucifixion, we see Judas as a much more dynamic character than that of the other eleven disciples, and we see a number of structural discrepancies in the disciples’ writings that challenge the accepted speed of Judas’ demise. Starting with the Last Supper, Judas quickly moves from a tertiary to critical player in the end of Jesus’ life and the fulfilment of some of the most important prophetical scripture to the foundations of the Christian faith, such as in Isaiah, where Christ is predicted to die on the cross\textsuperscript{15}.

One of the initially remarkable points of the Last Supper is how Jesus goes about explaining to his disciples that one of them would betray him to the Pharisees. He quotes a verse from one of David’s psalms, which says that, “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted his heel up against me.”\textsuperscript{16} What is interesting about the use of this Hebrew Bible verse is that he explains that a friend is betraying Him, which we all know to be Judas. Why would Jesus, who was incredibly well versed in the Jewish holy texts, use a verse referring to a friend if He was upset that Judas would sell him out to be murdered? The only logical answer is that Jesus understood this was necessary to fulfill the prophetical verse about his death and resurrection, and is giving some reassurance to Judas that this was acceptable. This belief is reinforced by the encounter between Jesus and God at the Mount of Olives, where Jesus

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{15} Isaiah 53.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Psalm 41:9.
\end{itemize}
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accepts his destiny and readies himself for the end of his life, and when Judas arrives, Christ tells him "Friend, do what you came for."\textsuperscript{17}

Furthermore, Jesus is not coy about who he knows will betray him. He explains that the disciple whom he hands the bread to will be the one who sells him out. Jesus then promptly turns to Judas, and holds out his bread-filled hand.\textsuperscript{18} There are a number of interesting factors that come out of this small passage of verses. The first is that all of the disciples know that Judas is the traitor, and yet they do nothing. Why? It is well documented that the disciples were in no way afraid to use force and violence to protect their leader. The most notable example of this is again at the Garden of Gethsemane, when, after the Pharisees and their guards approach, Peter asks if "[the disciples] should strike with our swords?"\textsuperscript{19} This is an almost rhetorical request, because before Jesus can even answer, Peter has already lopped the ear off one of the High Priest's servants.\textsuperscript{20} But if the disciples were so willing to attack in a losing battle, then why did they not attempt to overpower Judas and prevent him from going to the Pharisees when they had the advantage? The answer can be found in the general murmuring and debating that takes place in the wake of Jesus' fingering of Judas. The disciples are too self-absorbed, first glad that it is not any of them who has been selected to take on such a task and second, more interested in who Jesus considers to be the best disciple than the traitor.\textsuperscript{21}

Another interesting facet of the last supper is that after Jesus points out that Judas is the double agent, John explains that "Satan entered into [Judas]."\textsuperscript{22} This is an interesting claim by John for a number of reasons. The first is that the claim that Satan entered into Judas in order for

\textsuperscript{17} Matthew 26:50.
\textsuperscript{18} John 13:26-30.
\textsuperscript{20} John 18:10.
\textsuperscript{22} John 13:27.
him to go through with the betrayal makes little sense within the overarching concept of the Messianic Prophesy. If the prophesy was inspired by God, as the Bible claims to be,\(^{23}\) then how could Satan be responsible for advancing God’s plan, since Satan is inherently the inverse of the Trinity. This particular verse seems more like a posturing by John as a result of the disciple’s penchant for jockeying for Jesus’ favor. This statement is not without biblical merit, either. John never refers to himself by name in any of the books he penned, instead choosing to call himself “The Disciple whom Jesus loved.”\(^{24}\) So, John attempts to make Judas look like a pawn of Satan, and John seeks to try to look even better by comparison. But the issues with that verse go even deeper than inter-disciple politics. Many times throughout Jesus’ ministry, Christ explains that all the disciples, and all those who believe in Christ,\(^{25}\) have the power to drive out demons. We must assume that Judas had faith, since Jesus knew Judas’ nature before he selected him as a disciple. Therefore, if Judas has the power to cast out spirits, then how could it be possible for a spirit to take possession of him, as he is already stronger than any potentially malicious entity looking to occupy him? In short, this claim by John seems to be nothing more than lingering bitterness and political strutting in an effort to distance himself from the man responsible for getting Jesus killed.

After quickly making his exit from the upper room, Judas heads to the Pharisees to collect on his price of 30 silver pieces in exchange for delivering Jesus to them. We have to assume that Judas took the money in exchange for Jesus out of greed, based on the previously mentioned point about Judas’ penchant for dipping his fingers into the disciples’ treasury for his own personal gain. While this would at first seem problematic for Judas’ case, each of the

\(^{23}\) II Timothy 3:16.
\(^{24}\) John 13:23.
\(^{25}\) Mark 9:38-41.
disciples clung to some form of earthly treasure, whether it be pride, doubt, or money. But when we break down the numbers with this mindset, we are met with a puzzling conclusion: it does not make sense. When converted to today’s values, that comes to just a little over $565.00 USD.\textsuperscript{26}

Since Judas had access to a coffer with a much larger bottom line than the value of a small plot of low-yield land, why would he settle for such a measly sum? The only supportable conclusion to this is that Judas understood the prophecy concerning the betrayal of Jesus, and knew that a potter’s field (the amount predicted Jesus would be sold for) could be purchased for such a sum,\textsuperscript{27} and he acted accordingly. As such, we see another disparity between his overall actions, and the legacy his fellow disciples gave him postmortem.

Moving from the Last Supper to Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, we see another very interesting twist concerning Judas and the rest of the apostles. After the encounter at Gethsemane, the disciples flee, many to fulfill the prophetical statements that Jesus made at the Last Supper, and others simply to avoid arrest and fates similar to Christ. Judas, however, is the only disciple who stays with Jesus during the trial. In fact, in this set of verses, a reader sees Judas as a remorseful, distraught, and fully repentant man, again chipping away at the profile that John attempts to establish of Judas. An entire subsection of Matthew 27 is dedicated to the reaction of Judas to Jesus being condemned to death. We see here one of the most moving narratives in all the New Testament: a distraught Judas attempts to return the money to the Pharisees as a means to find penance for what he had done. The Pharisees reject him soundly, claiming that “blood money” could never be put into the temple’s treasury.\textsuperscript{28} Judas, in a fit of despair and rage, flings the coins into the temple and runs off, and after a time commits suicide.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Zechariah 11:12-14. 
\textsuperscript{28} Matthew 27: 7-8. 
\textsuperscript{29} Matthew 27:5.
The priests, now stuck with this blood money, use it to purchase a "potter’s field" to bury poor foreigners, while simultaneously fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah.\(^{30}\)

But the story of Judas does not end here, not yet at least. Though the account of Matthew quickly resolves the story of Judas by quickly killing him off, the books of Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles offer an interesting addition to the end of Judas’ life. One of the important structural styles of Luke and John’s writing was to refer to the disciples as “The Twelve.” This particular phrasing occurs numerous times in the Gospel of Luke, then suddenly changes in the early chapters of Acts. One of the most interesting notes to make about this structural concept is with the account of “Doubting” Thomas at the end of the book of John. John explains that Thomas, one of The Twelve was not present when Jesus first reappeared to the disciples, and he had to be shown the holes in Christ’s hands and feet to believe again.\(^{31}\) What is important to this essay is not Thomas’ doubt, but the fact that he was referred to as “one of the Twelve, [who] was not with the disciples when Jesus came.”\(^{32}\) For there to still be twelve disciples, with one missing, and Thomas being the absentee, then Judas could not yet be dead. As such, we see a sharp turn of loyalty back to Jesus, and further penance for the treason that he had committed, in addition to a reacceptance by the disciples. While this may seem at first rather trivial, in the first few chapters of Acts, the disciples are no longer referred to as the Twelve, but as the Eleven, implying thus that Judas had finally killed himself.\(^{33}\)

This brings us to the physical act of Judas’ suicide. The end of Judas’ life has become shrouded in various pieces of mythology, from Judas swelling up and being unable to escape the

\(^{30}\) Matthew 27:9, Zechariah 11:12-14.
\(^{32}\) John 20:24.
\(^{33}\) Acts 1:26.
path of a chariot to being hit and then bursting blood and gore all over the road. The canonical gospels give a less fantastical explanation: that Judas, in a bout of despair and self-loathing, set off by himself to a lonely field, and hanged himself. Acts offers a more graphic interpretation of what transpired when he ended his life: that Judas tumbled headfirst during his hanging, and burst all over the field, after which the location became known as Akeldama, or “Field of Blood.” What is important to note about this passage is that the Jewish concept of hanging is very different from the modern one. It is more akin to what King Saul did when he fell on his own sword — in short, Judas found a spear, spike, or other long, pointed object, and ran himself through. This explains the disciple’s interpretations as to why there was so much blood and gore as a result of Judas taking his own life, since it was more of a self-impaling rather than a noose. Because of this much more violent, much more determined manner of suicide, we can deduce a number of things about the last days of the life of Judas. The first is that he was obviously very disturbed by what he had done to his leader, friend, and Savior. It is also obvious that having seen Christ resurrected had a profound effect on Judas and his psyche, in that he realized that he was actually responsible for the death of the Son of God, and he could not live with what he had done, since the resurrection concretely proved Jesus’ divinity. Finally, he most likely suffered from a bout of fear over the condition of his eternal soul. In a number of Last Supper accounts, the writing disciple claims that Jesus followed up his command to Judas to do what needed to be done with a curse, saying things such as “woe to the one who betrays the Son

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35 Matthew 27:5.

36 Acts 1:18.

37 I Samuel 31:4-6.
of Man; it is better that he had never been born.”

The implication here is that Judas would be condemned to an eternal life in Hell following his actions against Christ.

However, there is an important counterpoint to this argument put forth by the remaining eleven disciples. The first is that there is a viable argument to say that if this case is true, and by betraying Christ and fulfilling the Messianic prophesies, Judas’ eternal life was forfeit, then Judas actually made a greater sacrifice than even Christ. Christ knew for the majority of his life that not only was he the Son of God and the ultimate intercessor for the sins of the world, but that he would be able to return to the kingdom he ruled in heaven upon his death. In short, Jesus would complete the prophecy and go back to heaven, while Judas would serve his part and be damned to hell.

An alternative view of the happenings of Judas can be found in his namesake gospel. The Gospel of Judas is one of the so-called Gnostic, or “secret knowledge” gospels that have not been canonized by the Christian church. In this gospel we find an interesting narrative which not only supports the idea of Judas as a critically important aid to Christ, but is, in fact, divine himself. In one anecdote, Christ asks for the disciples to present to him a man who is perfect enough to “stand before my face,” the disciples, ever arrogant, claim that each of The Twelve is strong enough to meet Christ’s challenge. None of the disciples can make good on their claims, with the exception of Judas, who is able to stand before Jesus, but must avert his gaze. This implies that while Judas is not on the same level as Jesus, Judas is actually much closer to Jesus that the other disciples. Not only does this shore up the question of the eternal condition of Judas’ soul, but the rest of the chapter explains the role of Judas within The Twelve for the rest of Christ’s time on earth. Finally, this gnostic gospel is centered on the concept that Judas had

39 Thompson, Study Bible, Judas 35: 3-6.
“gnosis,” or secret knowledge, about the nature of Christ and divinity. Since Judas was in possession of this special knowledge reserved just for him, we must understand that, at least according to this gospel, Judas had a special standing within the disciples. This further supports many of the other differences that Judas and the rest of The Twelve had, from his origins outside of Galilee to his differing role in the start of the early church.

This medieval column, from Cathédrale Saint-Lazare in Autun, France, depicts Judas at his suicide. Much in line with the biblical story, Judas is taunted and harassed by demons as he expires. This interpretation is largely consistent across medieval art, with Judas generally portrayed either sneaking away into the darkness after the last supper, or upside down as he dies, denoting him as opposite Christ.

In summation, when we look at Judas from outside the historical viewpoint and biases of the other disciples, we can see that Judas is not some traitor to Jesus, but instead an active and faithful servant of God, and a man willing to live up to the charge that Christ gave all his disciples when they were called by him, “You will now be fishers of men.” Judas was willing to make sure that the Old Testament prophesies were fulfilled so that all the world could have a

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41 Thompson, Study Bible, Matthew 4:19.
shot at redemption. This makes Judas not a target for condemnation, but one for necessary
further study, since he is regularly written off in non-scholarly biblical circles due to the
condemnation by the other disciples (most importantly those who wrote the Gospels). As such,
Judas is anything but fitting of the West’s concept of evil, and in fact makes him quite the
opposite. He is one of the most important servants to Jesus, the ministry, and spreading the word
of Jesus’ divinity while living in Jerusalem.
Adolf Hitler: Beyond the History Channel

With our new understanding of Judas Iscariot, we move several hundred years forward in history to the figure of Germany’s most infamous leader: Adolf Hitler. Modern Western History has remembered Hitler as the warmongering, racist national socialist who took Germany on its last great imperial tour through Europe. In addition, it has made sure to use Hitler’s “Final Solution” as the epitome of what it means to be a truly diabolical human—to exterminate an entire race on the basis of manufactured racial biases and inferiorities.

However, before we can delve into the question of the quality of Hitler’s evil, we must first explore what Hitler has become to the West in the 68 years since his suicide in his bunker as the Russian Army rolled through a broken Berlin. The simple fact is that Hitler exists outside the realm of the historically significant, the Julius Casears, the Alexander the Greats and the Isaac Newtons of world history. Hitler has become unto himself a brand name, a medium through which the West can create a baseline for the quality of evil or nefariousness an individual can commit, as well as a product to be bought, sold, and institutionalized into Western Culture.

This so-called branding of Hitler is most obvious with respect to the History Channel, and its near monopoly on the person, aura, and actions of Adolf Hitler. A quick search of the History Channel’s website yields 725 full pages of returns for “Adolf Hitler” in its articles and programming, another 330 for “holocaust,” and over 7,000 for “Nazi.” By comparison, searches for Alexander the Great return just 592 results, and Abraham Lincoln just over 3,000. This also comes on the back of a near monopoly of the History Channel throughout the late 1990’s and early 2000’s on Hitler-related historical documentaries. Everything from The Plots

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42 History.com search result.
43 History.com search result.
Against Hitler⁴⁴ to Hitler and the Occult⁴⁵ are the prime sellers of the cable channel’s empire of Hitler, trying to spin the Austrian-born dictator in the most villainous and unrepentant light. This was shown most boldly in the History Channel’s propensity to focus only on the narrative of the Allies vs. Hitler, and the sensationalized (if still accurately macabre) documentaries on the Holocaust, and Hitler’s plans for the Final Solution.

However, this simplified and heavily reduced character of Hitler, while it helped to define a generation’s understanding of the Nazi regime and the ideological structure of the Third Reich, also left out one of the most critical aspects for future generations to understand about Adolf Hitler: that he was a human being. The History Channel interpretation of Hitler looked only at establishing a Satan-level evil figure, one who could be easily identified as the “bad guy” for the Allies to beat back, and restore the status quo of Western Culture back to its rightful manner.

What it did not do after it drew its distinctions between good and evil was to delve deeper into the more mundane and humanistic features of Hitler: his young adult life, his home life, the fact that he had a girlfriend or his service in the First World War. The fact that groups like the History Channel have so effectively and totally defined the way that Western Culture perceives the idea of Hitler and what he did into such a small microcosm of his entire personality, has led to a serious crippling of Academia’s attempts to better define and research the overall person of Hitler, and give untainted views of who the person of Hitler truly was. Understanding this, we will now attempt to look at the character of Hitler, and discern more completely the nature of evil present in him.

⁴⁴ Lawrence Schiller, The Plot to Kill Hitler. (Warner Home Video, 2009).
However, the Hitler "brand" is not just a product of cable television. The idea of Hitler has grown outward from the ivory tower of historical study, and moved into the literary mainstream. Countless books exist pondering alternative histories where the Nazis succeeded at winning the Second World War, such as Philip K. Dick's alternate history *The Man in the High Castle*, which tells of the Germans and Japanese conquering and dividing the US between east and west. Others have taken to making sensationalized "academic" research into the inner workings of Hitler's mind, citing his childhood (and moderate abuse from his father) that lead to him becoming a genocidal megalomaniac.

The first necessary step to fully fleshing out the concept of Hitler as human, not a trope for demonhood, is to first realize just how ingrained into our culture the idea of Hitler has become. First, Hitler has become a sort of buzzword, nigh on cliché, for Americans to use to describe any political or public figure who happens to earn the ire of the court of public opinion. This was most noticeable in the workup to the 2004 Presidential Election, where the phrase "George Bush Hitler" scored an 86 out of 100 in terms of search frequency on Google. By comparison, "Barack Obama" scored a mere 65 at the same period before his election in 2008. However, the trend of the internet finding Hitler as an object of interest extends beyond simply slandering the names of politicians. At the same time, a popular blog titled "Hipster Hitler" has garnered almost 1,200,000 hits.

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48 Google search.
This webcomic focuses on mixing the two tropes of the viliness of Hitler against the neurotic self-absorption of the hipster subculture, generally through the use of tasteless puns and wry historical references. In the comic above, the authors make a play on the Nazi government (known as the Third Reich) and the chant from "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." In addition, the comic makes a joke concerning the Occupy Wall Street protests from late 2011, and compares them to Hitler's early campaigns to gain control of Poland in 1939.

At the same time, even more "professional" comedic outlets have tried to ride the Hitler wave. The successful stop-animation show *Robot Chicken* has featured several shorts called *Li’l Hitler*, focused on the juxtaposition of an aggressively imperialistic Hitler persona embodied in

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the figure of a young child. The comical image is carried further by the above still frame, as the character is made to look like a classic Looney Toons character.

What this use of Hitler as a comical medium shows is a number of things. First, the overall fear and repulsion felt by those who were most affected by Hitler’s aggressive imperial nationalism in the 1930s and 40s has been replaced by an off-color and macabre curiosity with the historical narrative that has been left behind by Hitler. The next is that we view Hitler less as a threat and more as a historical element, making him less of a taboo to be used in a comedic respect and more identifiable as a mainstream insult and baseline for comparing the atrocities of others.

Now that we have identified a relatively inclusive image (read: caricatures) of Hitler as he is constructed to the mainstream of Western Culture, we must compare it to the historical record. We will approach the life of Adolf Hitler from his birthplace in Austria-Hungary in 1889 and walk the same path he did. What we learn first is relatively obvious: he was not some sort of unsmiling, demonic entity who flashed out of the ether and was suddenly ready to rule the world under his myopic brand of nationalism. Hitler was once a young man with passions and aspirations. He was also just as much a patriot of his Germanic homeland and heritage as any American is of the United States. When war broke out in late summer 1914, Hitler enlisted in the German Army as a volunteer. While deployed, he was wounded at the Battle of the Somme, and subsequently decorated for his actions. There is still more to young Hitler than just his military training and service, however. Hitler is also well known for his penchant for art, and the infamous rejection from art school which many blame, however unfoundedly, for his genocidal urge. Countless reasons for why Hitler failed to be accepted into art school abound, from

rejection by a Jewish art professor\textsuperscript{53} to his rumored (and very symbolic) inability to draw the human form. This mixture of historical fact and old wives’ tales spins a very interesting and hard-to-prove story of Hitler’s young adult life, but it also shows that Hitler was not born and bred simply to conquer Europe and kill millions of people as a result. He was a young man just trying to make his way in the world and live out his goals.

Another interesting facet of Hitler in his youth that the historical record provides is his chivalrous respect for, and inability to court, women. Hitler has a noted appreciation for beautiful women, but as one of his closest friends, August “Gustl” Kubizek, explains, his appreciation for the female sex was more akin to an art critic viewing a masterwork than the typical skirt-chasing collegiate male.\textsuperscript{54} As a young man, Hitler committed himself to a radically ascetic, austere, and chaste existence. A fine example of this comes again from the account of Kubizek, who explains that when he and Hitler were attempting to rent a set of rooms from an older, rather attractive landlady, Hitler immediately left the meeting after the woman’s ill-fitting clothes revealed her lack of undergarments.\textsuperscript{55} Many would, at first, view this strong deviation from the standard expectation of how a young male would act, and thus further act as proof that Hitler was inherently inclined toward extreme reactions to morally or socially unacceptable behavior. However, we have also come to understand that this was less a deep-seated conviction to his moral compass and more a belief that as a politician, his lack of romantic ties made him more sexually appealing to the German public.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} The Telegraph Culture and Arts Staff, “Hitler Sketches that Failed to Secure Him a Place in Art School to Be Auctioned.” (24 Mar 2010).
\textsuperscript{54} Hamann, Hitler’s Vienna. 362.
\textsuperscript{55} Hamann, Hitler’s Vienna. 361.
\textsuperscript{56} Kate Connelly, Nazi Loyalist and Adolf Hitler’s Devoted Aid: the True Story of Eva Braun. (The Guardian, 14 February 2010).
Moving forward in the life of Hitler, we find one of the single most damaging artifacts to
the History “Channel-ization” of Hitler: the so-called “Hitler Home Movies.” These homespun
documentary reels, all filmed by Hitler’s girlfriend Eva Braun, feature a laughing, laid-back
Hitler as he resides in his vacation home. He is shown smiling, something that the charismatic,
upstart orator who moved thousands at rallies and speeches would never do. The world can see
Hitler as any normal man at home. He wears shorts and lederhosen. He plays with his dogs.
He embodies so many of the mannerisms, emotions, and social expectations that we expect of
any random Westerner, not the cold and calculating dictator that movies like *Inglourious
Basterds* and *Der Untergang* (The Downfall) attempt to sell. A number of voiced-over and
annotated versions of the tapes exist and provide a pivotal portrait of Hitler from those who were
closest to him after he took power. A voice actor reads excerpts from Eva Braun’s journal,
commenting on how Hitler loved to play with children, that they made him happy, and that the
children loved to be around Hitler. Later in the films, Hitler is seen dancing, sporting a wide
smile, almost laughing at himself.\(^5\) Another interesting component in the Hitler Home Movies is
that there are an incredibly large number of animals on the grounds of the Eagle’s Nest, showing
how much of an affinity for pets Hitler and Braun shared. One scene depicts Hitler smiling,
kissing, and petting his favorite dog “Blondi,” while another shows Eva kissing a rabbit while
her two Scottish Terriers scamper in the background. These images of Hitler, his girlfriend, his
friends, and their pets all make Hitler and his cohorts look more like average citizens than the
braintrust of a brutally genocidal regime. In short, this half hour reel of film does so much to
undermine the Western identification of Hitler as a singularly motivated mass murderer,

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incapable of emotions, feeling, or anything that did not explicitly advance his power both within
the German Reich or the diplomatic sphere of the European continent.

The next major fact that must be addressed when reviewing the historical character of
Hitler is to understand the differences of Hitler as an individual and the collectivization of
thought that Nazism produces. Though we know that the Third Reich was the invention of
Hitler, as expressed in his book Mein Kampf, where not only did he quite blatantly express his
disdain for the Jewish race, branding them as chaff,58 he also explained in his second volume the
manner through which the Nazi party should take power—through any relevant method,
including terrorism.59 What is even more damning of Hitler’s piece of demagoguery is that he
lays out his plan for the extermination of the Jews, which he envisioned as an international
undertaking that would be a “necessarily bloody process.”60 This same sentiment is also reflected
in Hitler’s views of homosexuals. When met with the advances of a wealthy, older, gay man,
Hitler staunchly rebuffed his attempts, claiming that homosexuality was a “perverse
phenomenon, to be fought by any means possible.”61

A further convincing argument in favor of Hitler as a figure of evil is that he takes the
concept of his “vision” and makes it into something much more sinister for the German political
and social structure during the tenure of the Third Reich. This shows through most strikingly
when looking at the Nuremberg Trial. During the prosecution, psychologist Gustave Gilbert was
able to interview and study some of the top living Nazis, producing a number of interesting
conclusions. One notable theme that stretched across a number of Nazi leaders when given a
series of Rorschach tests, is how eerily similar the responses of Hermann Goering, the head of

59 Hitler, Mein Kampf. 364.
60 Hitler, Mein Kampf. 370.
61 Hamann, Hitler’s Vienna. 356.
the Luftwaffe, Rudolph Hess, one of Hitler's closest political confidants, and Albert Speer, the architect of Hitler's pharaonic building plans, were. When presented with one particular image, both Goering and Hess immediately identified the image as a skinned animal, something like a bearskin rug. Speer was unable to produce any intelligible image from the paint spots. At the same time, when all three were asked if they could discern any kind of sexual or anatomical element from the picture, none were able to turn any part of the image into something they could describe. This seems to show a strong resonance back to Hitler's early beliefs in austerity and asceticism, and seem to promote the idea that his beliefs were able to permeate themselves into those around him, and produce a cohort of like-minded individuals within his inner circle. At the same time, the group's collective inability to see and reason in the abstract shows how effective the Nazi regimen of conditioning and propaganda was to even those who were in charge of both creating and disseminating it. Because of the consolidation of power and thought at the top of the Nazi hierarchy, all of Hitler's closest confidants adopted very similar views of politics and the world, in the form of an absolutist regime based on the racial superiority of the Germans. This creates an interesting question of whether or not it was Hitler or the Nazi ideal, where the source of evil was located, then perpetuated, grown, and blended into everyday German life that led this group of men to not only perform such heinous acts as the Holocaust, but also to ravage Europe, Asia, and Africa with war in the name of racial purity and for the sake of German ethnic and political dominance.

However, this concept of "expansionism through racism" is not necessarily historically grounded, at least at the beginning of Hitler's campaign through Europe. Though Hitler never shied away from his Kampf-ian views, Germany's earliest expansions (between 1933-39) were

buoyed more by the German military than by its political shifts.\(^6^3\) The SS, encouraged by its quick string of military and negotiated victories in the Sudetenland, acted as the key agency to mobilize Germany to war, brewing up a warhawk coalition within the Nazi party. In fact, the SS became so powerful in the 1930s that the top officers looked to create a “Germany after Hitler” ruled by the SS elite, who continue to practice the Hilterian style of anti-Semitism.

But Hitler was not entirely blind to these agendas. He was a practical politician who understood that he could not be directly associated with the anti-Jewish campaign at its onset, because the connection could harm his image both domestically and abroad. Throughout 1938, he forbade any reporters to posit queries about the “Jewish Question,” and made sure that many of his anti-Semitic legal policies were not advertised to the public.\(^6^4\) In fact, many of the early “Final Solution” measures were under the initiative that Hitler would implicitly approve of said actions. This idea of “working towards the Fuhrer,” a mixture of self-advancement and furthering Hitler’s long-term agenda, was the driving force behind the early Nazi aggression towards the German Jews.

Hitler had hordes of politicians, lawyers, doctors, and his secret police (the Gestapo), in place to help him realize his vision, without having to take the singular control that dictators like Stalin did. In fact, Hitler can be viewed in this early stage as more of a political organizer and nationalist patriot, focused foremost on the prospect of bringing Germany back to greatness, rather than the mastermind of one of the most institutionalized genocides in history. In fact, one of Hitler’s earliest plans for dealing with the “Jewish Question” was to have them all relocated from Europe. According to Goebbels and Hitler, Madagascar seemed like the most convenient


\(^{64}\) Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945*, 133.
location to dump them.\textsuperscript{65} This shows that the original Nazi intent, at least for Hitler, was less to destroy the Jews as a race, and more to marginalize them as much as possible. In this way, Hitler must be viewed not as an ideologically driven terrorist (at least in whole), but also as a very pragmatic leader who understood the importance of making sure that the international system had at least a semblance of respect and recognition of the German government as legitimate. While this will indefinitely be countered by the so-called Intentionalists, who draw a direct line from marginalization to extermination, the connection does not hold historical weight. Social and ethnic groups have always been marginalized in both the modern and pre-modern world without being decimated. The Hebrews in Egypt were kept in reported bondage by the Pharaonic Egyptians without being bled to death. In ancient Greece, weaker city-states, such as the Arcadians were marginalized by their larger Spartan brethren in the Peloponnesian League, but never massacred. In more recent history, black slaves in America were brutally kept in check by white slaveholders, but there was no region-wide execution of slaves. The case of the Nazis, then, can be viewed as a plan of marginalization taken to the extreme.

That said, Hitler made no attempts to stop his upstart subordinates in the Nazi chain of command, and while he took no credit for atrocities such as the riots in November 1938 known as the \textit{Kristallnacht}, he was in no way punishing his fellow party members for their actions. In fact, this undertaking was the brainchild of Joseph Goebbles acting without the consent of Hitler.

Understanding all of this, now it becomes important to take these two seemingly incompatible halves, that of Hitler the lover, friend, and parental figure, and Hitler the politician, racist, and tyrannical murderer, together. While it is out of the question to ignore the brutal crimes against humanity embodied in his pan-European genocide of the Jews, cracks in the

\textsuperscript{65} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler 1936-1945}, 134.
popular image of Adolf Hitler have begun to appear, even after this short exploration into the historical record and modern conceptualization of him. It is in this way that Hitler becomes a valuable historical figure, because he proves a number of important common themes. The first is that Hitler falls prey to the problem of being a historical loser. Because the Allies won, it is the Allied historians who get to paint the picture of Hitler’s legacy. While much of it is respectable (with the most obvious being the condemnation of the Holocaust), this plays into the History Channel history of Hitler, which funnels the common viewer to understand Hitler as a simple, evil automaton, rather than as a complex human. Furthermore, the West has continued to caricaturize Hitler at every turn. From edgy internet comics to the tasteless late night comedies, the West has turned to the memory of Hitler as a pseudo-demonic figure into one for profit. These works play off the West’s subconscious fears about what Hitler was able to accomplish as he laid out his grisly Final Solution, as well as the fear of connecting with Hitler on a human level should he ever be viewed only as a non-human entity of evil.

We can further link Hitler to the examination of Judas because of this inherent fear of graying the lines between good and evil. With Judas, the West has long held in taboo the idea that understanding the betrayer of Christ as anything but a Satan-possessed minion, and as such has drawn distinct lines of good and evil that should not, (and cannot) be crossed. This is similarly true with the two major alliances in World War II. The Allies fought for freedom, democracy, and the preservation of self-sovereignty amongst the countries of the European continent, according to the accepted narrative. To believe that the imperialist Axis Powers were anything but power-hungry, warmongering vermin totally undermines the established narrative of us-versus-them, good-versus-evil through we have attempted to turn the “Greatest Generation” into the protagonists.
Joseph Stalin: The Unremembered Tyrant

Moving on from this short study of Hitler, we shift to one of his contemporaries, and one-time ally. That is, the final case studied for this paper is that of Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, better known to the Western mainstream as Joseph Stalin.

Stalin, much like Hitler and Judas, came from much more humble and foreign roots than the heights he would ultimately be led. Born to a lowly Georgian farmer in December 1878, Stalin’s early outlook on his future did not hint at him rising to become one of the most powerful men in the world by his fifties. His father, Vissarion, a failed cobbler, drunkard, and generally absentee father figure, left the family and died a beggar in 1909. His mother, though it is claimed she is one of just three people Stalin ever felt love for, was not opposed to beating her only son. In a twist of irony, Stalin asked her just two years before her death in 1935 why she beat him so hard; his mother replied simply, “That’s why you turned out so well.”

Stalin became heavily involved in Communist Party activities following the December 1905 uprising, and quickly devoted himself to a much more aggressive—and much more vitriolic and ruthless—brand of selling the Communist Party line than Lenin. He claimed that the major detractors of the Party were nothing more than “circumcised Jews.” At one point in this early phase of the Communist Party, a fellow member questioned privately if there was any sincerity about Stalin’s commitment to the Revolution, or if he was just a “heartless machine in the form of a human being, bent on destroying everything and building something else in its place.” This notion was not lost on Stalin’s contemporaries either. Lenin was none too pleased at the

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66 Kuromiya, Profiles in Power. 1.
67 Kuromiya, Profiles in Power. 2.
68 Kuromiya, Profiles in Power. 3.
69 Kuromiya, Profiles in Power. 12.
70 Kuromiya, Profiles in Power. 12.
possibility of Stalin taking over control of the Politburo after his death, and even tapped the much more conservative and stable Leon Trotsky as the heir to Soviet Russia. After the death of Lenin in early 1924, Stalin set into motion his plan to rid himself of his competition, first undertaking a personal squabble between himself and the other six potential successors: the aforementioned Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, Lev Kamenev, Alexei Rykov, Mikhail Tomsky, and Grigory Zinoviev. After some initial political jockeying, Stalin’s grudge against them intensified. He systematically isolated Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev from the rest of the party, claiming that random acts of violence, specifically the murder of a popular party boss in Leningrad, were the product of radical Trotskyites. Stalin then launched a concerted purge against these opposing political factions, exiling Trotsky from Russia and expelling the rest from the Communist Party.

That said, Stalin is an interesting, and largely outlying case when set against this paper’s overall topic of Western Culture’s villains. Stalin lacks the cultural implications of Judas, and the social stigma weight that Hitler carries. In fact, Stalin is largely a non-entity in the general Western discourse. A telling poll taken in September 2008 on Russian attitudes toward Stalin showed an interesting statistic: 37 percent (the highest single response) claimed they felt “indifferent” towards Stalin. Why is this the case, both in the West and in Stalin’s political home country of Russia? It is well documented that Stalin’s lust for power and security of his position drove him to commit some of the most heinous acts of intra-state violence the modern world has ever witnessed. After his succession to power in 1929, Stalin set about securing his

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position as the sole power in the USSR through a series of purges. These purges targeted every aspect of Soviet life, most noticeably in the so-called “Great Purge,” which targeted believed saboteurs in the Soviet government, army, and even the recently liberated peasant class. In the military, Stalin’s sweeping indictments cost the Red Army between three and eight percent of its officer corps. In addition, 60 percent of the Navy’s five star generals, 86 percent of the Army’s three- and four-star generals, almost 90 percent of all admirals, 87 percent of all Red Army Corps commanders, all of the army’s commissars, and ninety percent of all the Army corps commissars were lost in the 1937-39 purges. Many were forced into exile or camps in Siberia; others summarily executed. All were expelled from the Communist Party, thus leaving them social, political, and economic outcasts in the USSR.

Stalin was not to stop there. In a means to secure his own political and social ideology within the Soviet intellectual circles, he also went about purging the academics. In a decade-long series of purges and trials, over 2,000 writers, artists, and other intellectuals were imprisoned, of which 1,500 died in the horrendous conditions of Soviet gulags. In addition, astronomers and meteorologists were also purged as punishment for practicing “un-Marxist” activities, and not accurately predicting damaging weather to Soviet crops. These missteps were responsible for the disappearance of nearly 30 astronomers during the height of the “Great Terror” of the 1930s.

The most brutal of these purges fell on the small, private land-owning farmers in the Western part of the Soviet Union, in what is largely present day Ukraine. These small farmers,

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known as “kulaks” were opposed to the collectivization of land under Marxist ideology, and were thusly targeted by Stalin’s Order No. 00447. This order requested information from local Soviet leaders concerning “anti-Soviet” groups in their region, focusing specifically on the aforementioned Kulaks, the clergy, former non-Bolshevik part members, officers of the defunct White Army, thieves, and those who had become forcibly disenfranchised. Between 1927 and 1931, nearly 17 million individual farms were collectivized across the Soviet Union; between 1937 and 1938, over 650,000 kulaks were arrested, with around 375,000 being executed. By the end of the purges in at the end of the 1930s, over 8 million Soviet citizens had been arrested, with 1 million executed. Some 7 million were sent to gulags, which ultimately amounted to death camps, where no more than 10 percent of prisoners in these camps would survive to see freedom. In total, these purges killed over an estimated 10 million Soviets, all as a means to protect the Marxist ideology of Moscow, as well as to solidify Stalin’s power within the Soviet political system. The majority of these deaths came from the artificial famines that Stalin imposed on the breadbasket regions of Ukraine and other western Soviet republics from 1932-1933. These famines were “artificial” because while the state was still able to extract over 4 million tons of its necessary grain requirements from the region (enough to feed 12 million people), it confiscated the sum total of these farmers’ production in order to meet Stalin’s outrageous agricultural five-year plan, leaving the farmers without sufficient food to survive.

79 From кулак, meaning “tight fisted.”
82 Werth, Secret Mission. 5.
84 Conquest, The Great Terror. 384.
Because of this sustained overtaxing of Ukrainian farmers, somewhere between five and eight million would die in their homes from starvation. 86

These horrid acts of crimes against humanity pose a pressing question: If Stalin was such an open and brutal dictator, why then does Stalin not share any of the same notorious limelight as Adolf Hitler? The answer to this question may be found in the form of convenient timing and historical coincidences. During the early stages of World War II, as the Allies were being battered by the combined powers of the Nazi on the Continent and Africa, and the Japanese in the Pacific, Stalin was actually considered to be a close, viable, and important member of the Allies. “Uncle Joe,” as the American media referred to him, was widely supported by the West during the darkest hours of World War II. The USSR occupied an important niche in the Allied overall campaign strategy—that is to say the massive, albeit crippling undersupplied, Red Army was holding down some of Hitler’s most elite units (the crack 4th Panzer Army and 6th Army divisions were decimated in the fight for Stalingrad from late 1942 through early 1943). While Stalin was holding back the Nazi attack into Russia, the other Allied nations were able to shore up the campaign in Africa and Italy, then move their attack to a second front in France in 1944.

However, this did not come free for the Western Allies. Stalin frantically requested the Americans and British open the second front as early as 1942, a request which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt balked at repeatedly. This bred a deep distrust between Stalin and Churchill/Roosevelt, and would cause Stalin to undertake a number of initiatives that would spark the already dry tinder for a Cold War following the defeat of the Nazis in 1945. After the Red Army seized control of Berlin and the remnants of the Nazi

chain of command organized an official surrender, the first project Stalin began was making sure that what happened to Russia in 1914 and the USSR in 1942 would not happen again: he would begin investing in European states to create a buffer zone to protect the USSR proper from any future Western invasion.

While this move has largely been interpreted as a wholly defensive strategy by the immediate postwar Soviets in retrospect, the then-contemporary United States and Great Britain feared the rise of a monolithic, and aggressive, Communist state. Churchill’s “Sinews of Peace” address discussed how an “Iron Curtain” had fallen over Eastern Europe.

Stalin, of course, got wind of these sentiments, which only vindicated his paranoia concerning Western intentions for the postwar world. Stalin further hurt his reputation with the West through his standoff in Berlin 1949, which the Trizonal Powers (America, Great Britain, and France) countered with the so-called Berlin Airlift.

However, even though Stalin became the lynchpin around Soviet expansionism, and his unwillingness to work diplomatically with the former Allies, systematically starting the Cold War which would consume the latter half of the twentieth century, he is not vilified for starting it. This must be attributable to some other outside factor. The most logical conclusion would be that the West did not fear Stalin as much because the vast majority of his atrocities were intrastate, unlike the Nazis who spread their death camps all about Europe. In addition, the West’s fear of Stalin may have been lost in a greater fear of the idea of “Communism.” Since the communist USSR and its dreaded imperialist and consuming nature was what Western (specifically American) politicians used as a rallying point for Americans in the new bipolar political world. As such, the fact that it was this abstract concept of the threat of “communism” absorbing the world, the fear and damnation of Stalin as a figure of evil was most likely simply
clumped in with the general American/McArthyist fear of all things Soviet and communist, which were assumed to work in a monolithic fashion.

Now that we have established an understanding of the reaction to Stalin in the West, we must now take a look more deeply into the historical record to see not only if this branding of Stalin as a figure of evil is correct, but how Stalin has transferred from the record into the daily discourse of Western life.

Furthermore, by securing this control over those he ruled, he could consolidate and isolate power within himself, and prevent that power from ever being threatened. However, this did not stop him from making many decisions that would also help to preserve that power. When Stalin’s son, Yakov Dzhugashvili, was captured by the Germans during the initial invasion of the USSR, Stalin refused a deal that would exchange a top ranking German officer for his son. While Stalin claimed that Germany had in its possession millions of Russia’s sons, and unless Hitler returned all of them to Moscow, then his son would share their fate. While this would at first seem like a very patriotic gesture, what is missing from this assessment of Stalin’s opinion is that Stalin had long held his son in utmost contempt, especially after Yakov survived shooting himself, which Stalin believed displayed that Yakov “couldn’t even shoot straight.”87 This shows that Stalin was wholly unwilling to associate himself with any individuals who did not fit correctly into his paradigm of strong and viable leaders, and to embrace his son’s shortcomings would link him to weakness, and thereby damage the cult of personality Stalin had worked so diligently to produce.

Another notable aspect of Stalin and his cult of personality is his deft understanding of how to organize a national sentiment around his seat of power: to invoke national pride and

87 Kuromiya, *Profiles in Power*, 68.
history as part of his namesake. As a measure to further cement Stalin’s position, Soviet historians set about creating strong parallels between the reigns of Stalin and the first Russian Czar, Ivan Grozny IV, or Ivan the Terrible.\(^{88}\) While the two were not wholly dissimilar, since Grozny was also a major political and social reformer of the sixteenth century (he sought to unify a Russian state assailed from both sides, consolidated power away from the private land-owning class, and was responsible for numerous political deaths as a result) the comparison is intriguing.\(^{89}\) Ivan IV was not in the sights of Soviet Reconstructionist historians at the beginning of Stalin’s reign, since Ivan’s political endeavors were by no means tied to the ideas of Marx. However, it became clear that in order to maintain Stalin’s image of power, the state would have to link him to a national figure of power. The so-called “Cult of Ivan the Terrible” was born. In this manner, the Stalinist government could justify its actions by harkening back to the founder of the Russian state, and show that Russians had always risen to the occasion when times were tough. At the same time, Stalin could use Ivan’s rejection of the Boyars (Russian aristocrats) as grounds for his violence against the landowning classes during his collectivization programs.\(^{90}\) While the comparison may have been apt to legitimize the actions of the Soviet government, it is curious that Russia’s most brutal dictator would seek to compare himself to another notoriously violent figure in the country’s history.

However, it is unfair to leave this discussion of Stalin at simply his egomaniacal pursuit of control and power. Joseph Stalin was arguably the catalyst that lifted Russia out of its backwater European-wannabe mire and jettisoned it into the twentieth century. Stalin more than


\(^{89}\) Barker, *The Deadly Parallel*, 192.

\(^{90}\) Barker, *The Deadly Parallel*. 192.
earned his title as the “Man of Steel”\textsuperscript{91} as a result of his infamous “Five Year Plans.” Claiming that the Soviet Union was “fifty or a hundred years behind the leading countries of the world” and that the Soviet Union must cover that gap in “ten years [...] or we shall be swept away.”\textsuperscript{92} He set about enacting ambitious industrial initiatives in the late 1920s and early 30s. Though these Пятилетка (piatiletka), which, as one writer explains, were less plans and more “challenges to be met,”\textsuperscript{93} they helped to lay over 1,000 miles of train track across the Soviet Union by 1930.\textsuperscript{94} In addition, these plans reached out across the whole of Soviet industry. Industrial output was to be amplified 78 percent, and agricultural production was to increase by a third between 1928 and 1933.\textsuperscript{95}

This was more than just a stimulus plan for the Russian economy, however. Stalin’s vision included the mass collectivization of farmland in order to facilitate the mountainous increase in harvest (what led to the previously mentioned purge of the Kulaks, who were unwilling to relinquish their lands); he also ordered the rehabbing of old factories and the creation of new factories to allow him to put his millions-strong “underfed, ill clothed, and ill paid”\textsuperscript{96} population back to work. And he succeeded. With few organized trade unions to stand in his way—and those that did exist were easily mutable to his will—Stalin could make this titanic initiative a reality. By 1930, Soviet Premiere Vyacheslav Molotov claimed to have already created over 300 new factories, including a huge steelworks in Magnitigorsk and an assembly in Stalingrad that was expected to churn out up to 50,000 tractors a year.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{91} From the Russian сталь, meaning “steel.”  
\textsuperscript{92} Graham, Stalin. 125.  
\textsuperscript{94} Strong, Stalin Era, 23.  
\textsuperscript{95} Graham, Stalin. 125.  
\textsuperscript{96} Graham, Stalin. 126.  
\textsuperscript{97} Graham, Stalin. 127.
However, these lofty expectations of uptakes in production by Soviet production centers heavily taxed the USSR’s natural resources. By running the nation’s textile mills twenty-four hours a day, Stalin’s plan quickly outpaced the ability of Turkmen cotton farmers to collect from their fields, which in turn led to a slowdown of cotton production, as well as the inability to keep the textile mills running at such a pace. This would eventually begin to cause both the farmers and the factory workers to fall behind Stalin’s demanding schedules. Ultimately, none of his aggressive economic plans would ever be met in the concrete, making his “piatiletkas” failures, at least on paper, despite the “moral victory” of rapid industrialization that Russia had long lacked.

However, as shown, Stalin’s determined, if ultimately unattainable goals allowed Russia to leap its way into the same industrial realm as the British and the Americans, whose observers were all highly impressed with the progress that the Soviet Union was able to make in such a short period of time. As such, Stalin must be commended for his efforts to allow both his country, as well as his people, to attempt to prosper in the economic environment presented to him, as well as for his determination to not let his country remain a socio-political backwater, as it had in the twilight of the Czar period and the early Soviet revolution.

Furthermore, Stalin was able to adequately recentralize Soviet political power within himself in order to make the USSR a much more mobile and flexible political machine than it had been under the splintered and fractured period from the 1905 revolt through the conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks from 1918 through the early 1920s.

So to compare the popular image of Josef Stalin against his historical character shows a strong disconnect between the terrifyingly cold Stalin who was paranoid, psychotic, and brutally despotic against the popular lack of remembrance and respect for both the dark and violent
period of transition that Stalin put the Russian people through, in addition to the modern reign of terror that he subjected the Soviet Union to in order to secure his power. As such, Stalin can be viewed as the outlier in this set of case studies, since he was responsible for the deaths of millions of working class Soviets, the very people his party claimed to champion. At the same time, however, he was critical to the modernization of the Soviet economy, and laid the groundwork for the USSR to become one of the world’s foremost powers throughout the twentieth century. In short, Stalin can be viewed as a forgotten genocidal killer, one who has had his dark deeds covered by the impressive success of his industrial plans as well as an overarching fear of the concept of Communism, rather than the face of a leader. What must be remembered, however, is the serious gap in blame and infamy that Stalin has retained as a result of his atrocious acts of violence against his fellow countrymen and citizens. The mere fact that Stalin was able to kill many more than Hitler and the Nazis, yet retain a fraction of the notoriety shows the skewed version of history that Western culture has maintained over the last half century. If anything, it is a travesty to both the memory of those killed, and the study of history, that Stalin is cast as a secondary player, when his actions were much more heinous and repugnant than any other dictator in the twentieth century, and possibly in history.
Conclusion

To conclude our examination of these three case studies of villainy in Western culture, the historical record has offered a number of profound revelations to how incomplete the current image of Stalin, Hitler, and Judas have become in the eyes of the average western individual. Judas has been misinterpreted thanks to lingering bitterness and political jockeying amongst the post-crucifixion discipleship. Hitler, though definitely a subject of condemnation for his part in the Holocaust, as well as one of the single most brutal conflicts the world has endured, was not a mono-thematic character, but a dynamic, normal human being. He could feel love, friendship, happiness, joy, and ambition. Stalin revealed a figurehead much more worthy of scorn by modern memory than what he is given credit for. His systematic removal of millions of Ukrainian farmers, his top military commanders, the Russian intellectual elites, and other groups make him not only a violent despot, but also an affront to education, political stability, and non-quantitative progress within the early USSR.

It is thus a fair conclusion to identify the three as the following. Judas is the most undeserving of his badge as a historically evil figure, being more a product of circumstance rather than intention. In addition, his promotion of biblical prophecy puts him more in the realm of a pious servant of God, rather than a lackey of Satan. For Hitler, his designation as evil still holds most of its water, but his story must not be watered down, and academia should remember to explain Hitler in his entirety, rather than tiptoeing around the idea that he was a person, and taking the easy approach and railing against him for the Holocaust. Stalin is much the opposite of Judas—he should be much more widely reviled for his deeds than the West is willing to blame him for. Finally, it is imperative that the West be educated and informed of the violence Stalin
and his regime wreaked on the Soviet population, if for no other reason than to prove just how much power can corrupt.
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