

Ben Shahn: Reconstruction (1945)  
Whitney Museum  
of American Art, New York

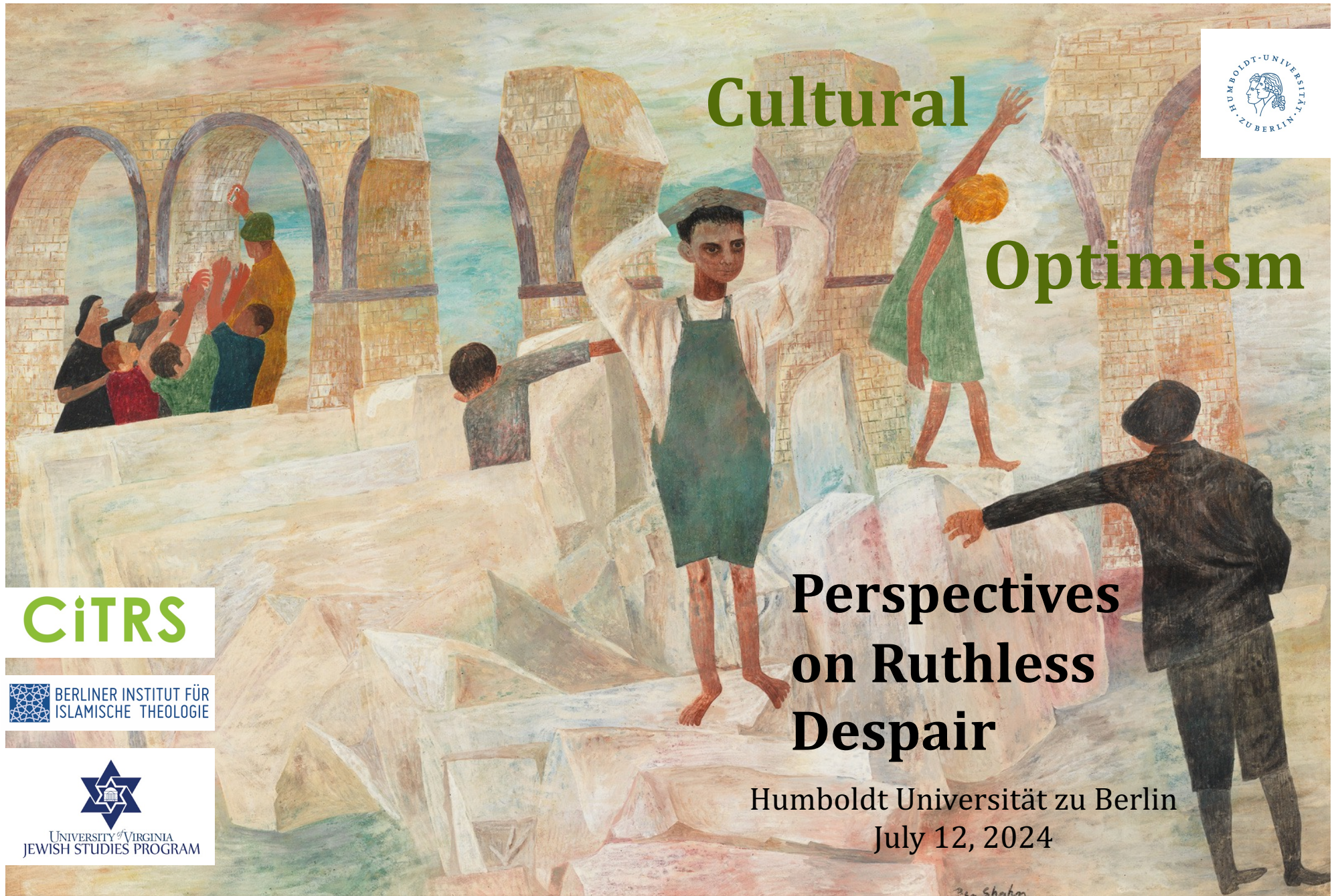
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Humboldt Universität  
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Berliner Institut für  
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Jewish Studies Program



# Cultural

# Optimism

## Perspectives on Ruthless Despair

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin  
July 12, 2024



*11:00 – 12:15: Imperatives of Optimism*

**Ufuk Topkara** (Humboldt Universität): Welcome

**Ursula Renz** (Karl-Franzens Universität, Graz):  
„Historische Zuversicht‘ (Hermann Cohen) – what could this be?“

**Asher Biemann** (University of Virginia/Humboldt Universität):  
"Optimism as a Modern Jewish Imperative."

*12:30 – 14:00: Lunch (catered)*

*14:00 – 15:30: Optimism, Trauma, and Despair*

**Miguel Vatter** (Deakin University):  
"To the Planetarium: Astral Theology between Despair and Optimism."

**Jennifer Geddes** (University of Virginia):  
"Beyond Optimism and Despair: Hannah Arendt on Natality and Action."

**Cedric Cohen-Skalli** (University of Haifa):  
"Optimism in Israel-Palestine and MENA? Transforming Traumas into a Shared History."

*15:30 – 16:00: Coffee Break*

*16:00 – 17:30: Transatlantic Perspectives*

**Charles Mathewes** (University of Virginia):  
"Reflections on Tocqueville's Paradox from a Post-Apocalyptic Perspective."

**Marcia Pally** (New York University/Humboldt Universität):  
"The 'Can-do' Cultural Optimism and Progressivism of Nineteenth Century American Evangelicals."

**Kai Parker** (University of Virginia):  
"Of Swan and Sorrow Songs: Wagnerian Optimism and Black Church Despair in the Early W.E.B. Du Bois."

*18:00: Dinner for Conference Participants*

All workshop sessions will take place at the  
**Berliner Institut für Islamische Theologie**  
Hannoversche Straße 6  
10115 Berlin  
**Room 1.31**