



INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON
OSTROM WORKSHOP

TOCQUEVILLE LECTURE SERIES

Aaron Tugendhaft

Bard College Berlin

Discussant: Michael Weinman *Comparative Literature, IU*

April 9, 2021: 12:00 – 1:30 pm EST

Virtual via Zoom: [Click here for link to Zoom meeting](#)



Iconoclasm and Politics: A Conversation Inspired by *The Idols of ISIS*

In 2015, the Islamic State released a video of men smashing sculptures in Iraq's Mosul Museum as part of a mission to cleanse the world of idolatry. *The Idols of ISIS: From Assyria to the Internet* unpacks three key political facets of that event: idolatry as a political charge, the museum as an institution that produces political meaning, and the internet as a space for both image circulation and algorithmically governed iconoclasm. Drawing connections across the millennia, with discussions ranging from Assyrian palace reliefs to medieval Islamic philosophy to first-person shooter video games, the book investigates the perennial impulse to destroy images and the concomitant practice of producing images that depict that destruction. With relevance well-beyond the actions of the Islamic State, *The Idols of ISIS* compels readers to reconsider the political power of images from multiple perspectives and ask whether political life is possible without idolatry.

Aaron Tugendhaft is a comparative political theorist and historian of political thought whose work renders ancient Mesopotamia relevant to contemporary concerns. He is the author of *Baal and the Politics of Poetry* (Routledge, 2018) and *The Idols of ISIS: From Assyria to the Internet* (Chicago, 2020), as well as co-editor of *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford, 2011). In 2013, he received the Jonas C. Greenfield Prize from the American Oriental Society. He currently teaches at Bard College Berlin.

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