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## Indignation

William L. Blizek

*University of Nebraska at Omaha*, [wblizek@unomaha.edu](mailto:wblizek@unomaha.edu)

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha

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# Indignation

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *Indignation* (2016) directed by James Schamus.

## **Author Notes**

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



*Indignation*  
(2016)

Directed by James Schamus

Marcus Messner (Logan Lerman) is a good boy – a very good boy. And, he's indignant throughout the movie because people continually challenge his choices: his father the kosher butcher, the Dean of his college, his classmates, and of course, his mother. There is a lot to be indignant about in the life of Marcus Messner in 1951.

Marcus finally escapes New Jersey and the criticism of his father by enrolling into a small community college in Ohio. Well, not exactly escapes, but at least now his father can only complain on the phone. As a student at Winesburg College, Marcus studies hard, gets good grades, works in the library, and meets Olivia Hutton (Sarah Gadon). Marcus and Olivia have only one date and then struggle with their relationship throughout the rest of the movie.

When Marcus' mother comes to visit, she announces that she is going to divorce Marcus' father, whose complaining has gotten much worse. The complaining has driven Marcus' mother crazy. Marcus talks his mother out of divorcing his father, but in exchange she extracts a promise

from Marcus that he will stop dating Olivia. Marcus promises his mother that he will no longer see Olivia.

After talking to Marcus' mother, Olivia disappears and Marcus learns that she has had a mental/emotional breakdown and has been placed in an institution. He blames himself, but all he can do is send Olivia a letter in which he tells her that, for the short time they were together, she was loved.

Interwoven into the story of Marcus and Olivia is a discussion about being Jewish and being Jewish at a college with few Jewish students. Is it fair, Marcus asks the Dean, that Jewish (or atheist) students have to attend Chapel in order to graduate? Why do Jewish students have their own fraternity – why are they separated from other students?

The twist here is that Marcus is less concerned with the College's treatment of him as a Jew than he is about the College's treatment of him as an atheist. He has been reading Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian* and he rejects Christianity for all of the same reasons as Russell. In the end he is most indignant about the criticism of his atheism.

The movie is based on a novel by Philip Roth (which was inspired by Roth's own college years) and has all of the usual Roth tropes that make it a charming story. The film version does an excellent job of retelling the story.