

NEH Application Cover Sheet (FA-252507)

Fellowships for University Teachers

PROJECT DIRECTOR

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USA

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Field of expertise: Russian History

INSTITUTION

Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1776

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *Ideologies on Display: Jewish Ethnography in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*

Grant period: From 2017-01-01 to 2017-12-31

Project field(s): Jewish Studies; Russian History

Description of project: This project offers a comprehensive history of state-sponsored Jewish ethnographic scholarship and related museum curation in the USSR during the interwar years. It examines the study of Jews of Ashkenazi descent, primarily in Soviet Ukraine and Belorussia, as well as the numerically smaller non-Ashkenazi Jewish populations in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Crimea. Drawing on the expertise of an international team of scholars, the project, for which I serve as editor and coordinator, will result in an English volume of critical essays and translations of rare archival materials, and a free, publicly accessible, English-Russian website featuring virtual tours of ethnographic expeditions conducted in Soviet Jewish communities in the 1920s-1930s. Each format will probe the relationship of knowledge production and power, exploring how ethnographers navigated the opportunities and perils of state-subsidized scholarship under a regime that selectively promoted and repressed Jewish identity.

REFERENCE LETTERS

Mikhail Krutikov
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NEH Supplemental Information for Individuals

This form should be used by applicants to the NEH Fellowships, Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan, Awards for Faculty, and Summer Stipends Programs.

Field of Project:

Field of Project #2:

Field of Project #3:

Project Director Field of Study:

The mailing address provided on the SF 424-Individual is for your ☒ work ☐ home

Institutional Affiliation

Are you affiliated with an institution? (If yes, provide information below.) ☒ Yes ☐ No

Institution Name:

Street 1:

Street 2:

City:

County:

State:

Province:

Country:

Zip / Postal Code:

DUNS Number:

Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN):

Status: ☒ Senior Scholar ☐ Junior Scholar

Reference Letters

Reference 1

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Department Name:

Institution:

Reference 2

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Department Name:

Institution:

Nominating Official (Summer Stipends Applicants Only)

Are you exempt from nomination? If not, provide information below. ☐ Yes ☐ No

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Institution:

Ideologies on Display: Jewish Ethnography in the Age of Lenin and Stalin

Deborah Yalen

In March 1939, the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad opened a major exhibition entitled “The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR.” Encompassing the period 1881-1939, this ambitious installation portrayed Jewish life under Soviet communism as a story of liberation from the antisemitic oppression of the old Imperial regime. In depicting Jews as valuable members of the larger Soviet family of nations, the exhibit may very well have been interpreted by contemporary viewers as a pointed rebuke of “The Eternal Jew,” another museum display inaugurated in Nazi Germany just two years earlier, which utilized pseudo-anthropological scholarship to portray Jews as racial enemies of the German *volk*. Yet while Soviet curators characterized their work as a scientifically-grounded refutation of Nazi propaganda, “The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR” was itself an elaborate work of ideological indoctrination intended to glorify the Stalinist regime and its ostensibly benevolent policy towards non-Russian nationalities. The exhibit remained open to the Soviet public even after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939, and was forced to close only in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941.

As pioneering scholarship has demonstrated in recent years, ethnographic science played a critical role in defining and legitimizing the Soviet state virtually since its inception. Jews played multiple roles in this partnership of ethnography and state-building: as Bolshevik theorists and policy makers, as ethnographers who collaborated with the regime, and as objects of ethnographic study. They did so at a historically unique juncture, when the new regime simultaneously empowered Jews as a Soviet nationality and disenfranchised them as members of a declassed petty-bourgeois religious community. While “The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR” served overtly as a platform for celebrating the successes of Stalinist nationality policy, it also marked an ambiguous culmination point in nearly two decades of state-sponsored scholarship on Jewish life in the Soviet Union. Since the early 1920s, the Bolshevik state had forcibly nationalized private Jewish scholarly institutions at the same time that it commissioned its own ethnographic and sociological studies of Soviet Jewish populations. While much of this material was overtly class-based and politically tendentious, it generated a wealth of information about Jewish socioeconomic life that was not always flattering to the state. By the time that the 1939 exhibit was inaugurated, however, these findings were submerged beneath a façade of Stalinist triumphalism. In light of these trends, existing scholarship on the history of Russian Jewish ethnography tends to uphold a dichotomy between “authentic” Jewish ethnography produced by privately-funded scholarly organizations and intellectuals before 1917, and a politically inflected scholarship sponsored by the Bolshevik authorities.

“Ideologies on Display: Jewish Ethnography in the Age of Lenin and Stalin” offers a different approach to the history of Jewish ethnographic scholarship, scholarly criticism of Judaism, and related museum curation in the Soviet Union during the interwar period. It argues instead that the transition from one system of knowledge production to another was more nuanced and complex than the enduring Cold War narrative acknowledges. By mining unpublished archival sources in Russia, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus, this project seeks to establish a multi-dimensional picture of the post-1917 Jewish ethnographic project as it was coopted into the Soviet scientific infrastructure. It explores how Jewish ethnographers navigated the possibilities and limitations of state-sponsored scholarship, as well as their own contradictory roles serving as agents of both Jewish cultural preservation and Soviet cultural homogenization. The project is thus animated by a number of issues central to the humanities. It engages directly with the relationship of knowledge production and state power at a time of tremendous political and social turmoil, and considers the degree to which individual scholars exercised agency within Soviet institutions. It also explores the impact of their curatorial activities on the Soviet public, and asks how we, armed with the benefit of historical hindsight, should evaluate scholarship produced within an officially Marxist-Leninist framework.

This project originated in a series of scholarly conversations between myself and several senior colleagues (Drs. Alexander Ivanov, Alla Sokolova, Valery Dymshits, and Evgeniia Khazdan) at the Interdepartmental Center “Petersburg Judaica” at the European University in St. Petersburg, Russia (see <https://eu.spb.ru/en/petersburg-judaica>). It is rooted in our common interest in the scholarly legacy of Yehoshu’a (Isaiah Mendelevich) Pul’ner, the director of the Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad from 1937-1941. We compared notes based on our experiences conducting independent research in various archives, particularly the archive of the Russian Ethnographic Museum in

St. Petersburg, which is the post-Soviet successor to the SME. Recognizing the sprawling nature of interwar Soviet Jewish ethnographic scholarship, which spanned not only Russia but also Ukraine, Belorussia and Georgia, as well as the breadth and complexity of the archival sources, I proposed that a comprehensive study of Soviet Jewish ethnography could best be served by a collaborative approach. In 2014, in order to formalize a collaborative working relationship with my colleagues, I negotiated a non-financial International Memorandum of Understanding between Colorado State University and the European University of St. Petersburg. At that point the project was temporarily delayed by the closure of the archive of the Russian Ethnographic Museum for renovations (the archive is scheduled to reopen in summer 2016).

In the interim, the project team worked via e-mail and Skype to shape the theoretical parameters of the project, which will result in two distinct products: an internationally-authored English-language volume that will feature scholarly essays and annotated translations of previously unpublished documents from the Soviet archives; and a free, publicly accessible, English-Russian website which will offer virtual tours of several ethnographic expeditions carried out among Jewish communities in the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belorussia, and Georgia. These will include interactive maps linked to photos, archival documents, and explanatory text. By pursuing both a print and free digital approach, the project intends to reach a broad and diverse audience of scholars and non-specialists of various ages.

As the initiator, editor, and coordinator of this collaborative project, I seek NEH funding to support my individual scholarly contribution to the volume, which will include writing the introduction and several chapters of the print volume, and the overall administration of the entire project on the U.S. side. The administrative component includes soliciting, reviewing, and editing all chapter contributions, coordinating and organizing the selection of primary source materials for translation, the securing of permissions, and liaising with prospective academic publishers and translators. While the website component will be constructed and administered by the webmaster of the Center "Petersburg Judaica," I will also work with my colleagues in St. Petersburg to develop content. NEH support for the 2017 academic year (which coincides with my sabbatical) will allow me to make a series of overseas trips in order to conduct additional archival research, particularly in St. Petersburg, to coordinate logistics with collaborators, and to secure permissions from archives and libraries. It will also allow me to complete my scholarly contributions to the print volume, which will focus in whole or in part on the following components of the Table of Contents (see below): Part I (1, 3 and 4), Part II (5, 6 and 7), Part III (11, 13, and 14), and Part IV (16 and 17). Together with my colleagues, I will also identify, select and annotate primary source materials, which will be translated into English at a later date by professional translators.

Part I/Historical Background and Theoretical Parameters

1. Introduction
2. Defining Jews: Ashkenazi and Non-Ashkenazi Jewish Populations in Russia and the Soviet Union
3. Jewish Ethnographic, Folkloric and Religious Scholarship in Russia & the Soviet Union, 1900s – 1941
4. Jewish Ethnographic Studies and Exhibitions in a Pan-European Context: the Soviet Case

Part II/The 1920s: Old and New Agendas

5. Institutional Networks and Ideological Ambiguities
6. Traditional Jews and their Faith in the Pages of Anti-Religious Periodicals
7. The Training of a New Generation: "Auto-Ethnography" vs. State Imperative
8. Collecting: Jewish Material and "Folk" Culture in a New Idiom
9. Jews on Display: Museum Activities in the 1920s

Part III/The 1930s: Jewish Stalinist Ethnography and Religious Studies

10. Judaism in Anti-Religious Museum Projects and Periodicals: Leningrad and Moscow
11. The Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad
12. Expeditions: The Jewish Autonomous Region in the Soviet Far East
13. Ideology on Display: The 1939 Exhibit "Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR"
14. New Research Horizons? The Hitler-Stalin Pact and Occupied Poland

Part IV/Unrealized Projects on the Eve of Catastrophe

15. Yehoshu'a (Isaiah Mendelevich) Pul'ner Unpublished Dissertation on the Jewish Wedding
16. The Jewish Woman as Object of Ethnographic Study
17. Epilogue: The Post-War Fate of the Jewish Collections at the State Museum of Ethnography

Part V/Translated and Annotated Source Materials

- Expedition Field Notes
- Personal Correspondence
- Institutional Documentation
- Unpublished Research

While recognizing that one year of individual funding is unlikely to bring an undertaking of this scope to completion, I am confident that it will enable me to finalize my own scholarly contributions, as well as significantly advance the overall progress of the print volume and the selection of content for the website. I have extensive experience working in numerous Soviet archives, including the archive of the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg, where the records of the Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad are preserved. I am well-acquainted with the bureaucratic culture of these archives, and can navigate them in Russian. While most of the archival sources are in Russian, I also have the ability to read materials Yiddish, as well as Ukrainian and Belarusian. The one context in which I will need to hire a local translator is in Georgia (Tbilisi and Kutaisi), where the archival inventories are in Georgian, even though the archival materials that I seek are likely in Russian. As for the overall administrative challenges, my ability to coordinate institutional collaboration on two continents in two different languages has already been demonstrated by my success in negotiating an International Memorandum of Understanding between my home institution and the European University of St. Petersburg, Russia -- a key first step in getting the project underway -- and by my ability to reach consensus regarding the overall scope and structure of the print volume and the website.

My scholarly qualifications for the project are showcased in two recently published, peer-reviewed articles devoted to the history of Soviet Jewish ethnography and ethnographic museum displays: "The Shtetl in the Museum: Representing Jews in the Eras of Stalin and Putin" in *East European Jewish Affairs* (2015) Vol. 45, Issue 2-3: 174-189; and "After An-sky: I.M. Pul'ner and the Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad" in Jeffrey Veidlinger, ed., *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse* (Indiana University Press, 2016): 119-145. The first article juxtaposes representations of the shtetl, or Jewish market town, in two very different museum displays: the state-sponsored 1939 exhibit "The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR," and the privately-funded Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center, which opened in Moscow in 2012. Though conceived under radically different ideological and political circumstances, I argue that each exhibition conveys a significant message about the place of Jews in Soviet and post-Soviet society, respectively, and that each positions the shtetl as a formative arena for Jewish civic identity vis-à-vis the Russian state. I conclude that these two museum projects raise strikingly similar questions about how and why cultural institutions are mobilized to define the relationship of Jews to the state. The second article explores the professional trajectory of I.M. Pul'ner, the director of the Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad, and his role in conceptualizing and curating the 1939 exhibit "The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR." Both articles offer just a sampling of a far more extensive array of archival materials that will be featured in the edited volume.

In terms of disseminating the print volume, we hope to secure a contract with an academic press that has a strong record of promoting interdisciplinary Jewish Studies titles (e.g., Indiana University Press or Rutgers University Press). I believe that the scholarly essays and translated primary sources in the print volume will stimulate further interdisciplinary scholarship among researchers working not only in the fields of Soviet Jewish history, but also in museum studies, cultural anthropology, and ethnic studies. At the same time that the print volume will conform to a high standard of scholarly rigor, it will avoid academic jargon and will be accessible to educated non-specialists. In turn, the free, bilingual website will introduce an international general public to the history of Jewish ethnographic scholarship under Soviet communism, and the virtual ethnographic expeditions feature can be used by Jewish museums as well as educational institutions at the secondary and college levels.

Yalen/Bibliography of Selected Primary and Secondary Sources

Selected Primary Sources (Published)

- Bogoraz, V.G., ed. *Evreiskoe mestechko v revoliutsii* [*The Jewish Shtetl in Revolution*]. Moscow, 1926.
- Pul'ner, I.M. *Evrei v tsarskoi Rossii i v SSSR: kratkii putovoditel'* [*The Jews in Tsarist Russia and the USSR: Exhibition Guidebook*]. Leningrad, 1939.
- “Itogi i zadachi izucheniia kavkazskikh (gruzinskikh i gorskikh) evreev,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* [“Results and Goals in the Study of Georgian and Mountain Jews of the Caucasus,” *Soviet Ethnography*] 4-5 (1936): 105-121.
- “Voprosy organizatsii evreiskikh etnograficheskikh muzeev i evreiskikh otdelov pri obshchikh etnograficheskikh muzeiakh,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* [“Questions about the Organization of Jewish Ethnographic Exhibits & Jewish Sections of Ethnographic Museums,” *Soviet Ethnography*] 3-4 (1931): 156-163.
- “Zur volkskunde der georgischen Juden,” *Mitteilungen zur Jüdischen Volkskunde* [“On the Folklore of Georgian Jews,” *Communications on Jewish Folklore*] 31-32 1929: 60-65.
- Pul'ner, İosyp. “Obriady i povir'ia, spolucheni z vahitnoi, porodileiu i narozhdentsem u zhydiv (materiialy do porivnial'noho vyvcheniia narodnoi medytsyny i fol'kloru u zhydiv),” *Etnohrafichnyi visnyk* [“Customs and Beliefs Related to Pregnancy, Birth and the Newborn Among Jews,” in *Ethnographic Bulletin*] 8 (1929): 100-114.
- Shternberg, L.İa., “Problema evreiskoi etnografiia,” *Evreiskaia Starina* [“Problems of Jewish Ethnography,” *Jewish Antiquities*] 12 (1928): 11-16

Selected Primary Sources (Unpublished/Archives)

St. Petersburg, Russia: Russian Ethnographic Museum; St. Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography; Georgia: Archives of the Historical & Ethnographic Museum of Georgian Jews (Tbilisi); Central State Archives of Kutaisi; Ukraine: Institute for the Study of Art, Folkloristics and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv); Belarus: Institute for the Study of Arts, Ethnography & Folklore of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (Minsk)

Selected Secondary Sources

- Carbonell, Bettina Messias, ed. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Cvetkovski, Roland, and Alexis Hofmeister, eds. *Empire of Others: Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*. Central European University Press, 2014.
- Deutsch, Nathaniel. *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life & Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*, Harvard, 2011.
- Goluboff, Sascha L. “Are They Jews or Asians? A Cautionary Tale about Mountain Jewish Ethnography,” *Slavic Review*, 63/1 (Spring 2004): 113-140.
- Greenbaum, Alfred Abraham. *Jewish Scholarship & Scholarly Institutions in Soviet Russia, 1918-1953*. Jerusalem, 1978.
- Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union*. Cornell, 2005.
- Ivanov, Alexander. “The Exhibition ‘Jews in Tsarist Russia and in the USSR’,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 43/1 (2013): 43–61.
- Kan, Sergei. *Lev Shternberg: Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist*. Lincoln, 2009.
- Kiel, Mark William, “Twice Lost Legacy: Ideology, Culture and the Pursuit of Jewish Folklore in Russia until Stalinization” (PhD diss, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1991).
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. UC Press, 1998.
- Krutikov, Mikhail. *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and Work of Meir Wiener*. Stanford, 2011.
- Lixfeld, Hannjost. *Folklore and Fascism: the Reich Institute for German Volkskunde*. Bloomington, 1994.
- Mogil'ner, Marina. *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*. Lincoln, 2013.
- Safran, Gabriella. *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-sky*. Cambridge, MA, 2010.
- and Andreas Kilcher, eds. *Writing Jewish Culture: Paradoxes in Ethnography*. Bloomington, 2016.
- Veidlinger, Jeffrey, ed, *Going to the People: Jews & the Ethnographic Impulse*. Bloomington, 2016.

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EDUCATION

University of California, Berkeley, Department of History, Ph.D., 2007
Georgetown University, M.A., Russian Area Studies Program, 1994
Columbia University, B.A., English, 1989

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Associate Professor, Department of History (August 2015 – current)
Assistant Professor, Department of History (August 2008 – August 2015)

Courses Taught

- HIST101: Western Civilization/Modern Period
- HIST324: Imperial Russia
- HIST331: The Soviet Union
- HIST338: The Holocaust in Historical Perspective
- HIST467: Modern Jewish History
- HIST492: Senior Capstone Seminar: Nation and Empire in Imperial Russia/Soviet Union
- HIST521: Graduate M.A. Reading Seminar: European History since 1815

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Louis and Helen Padnos Visiting Professor of Judaic Studies (Fall 2014)

Courses Taught

- HIST386/Judaic386: The Holocaust in History
- Judaic417: The Shtetl: Image and Reality

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania (Spring 2015)
Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Michigan (Fall 2014 and AY 2007-2008)

SELECTED ACADEMIC GRANTS

- Holocaust Educational Foundation Course Development Travel Grant (Summer 2016)
- Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry Research Grant (Summer 2014)
- IREX Title VIII Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Grant for research in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (2010-2011)

LANGUAGES

- Fluent (non-native): Russian
- Reading Proficiency: Yiddish – Ukrainian – Belarusian – Polish

PUBLICATIONS AND WORKS IN PROGRESS

Works in Progress

- *A Comprehensive History of the Jews in the Soviet Union/Volume: 1929-1939/Stalinist Socialism* (co-authored with Arkadi Zel'tser, under contract with NYU Press)
- "Ideologies on Display: Jewish Ethnography in the Age of Lenin and Stalin" (edited volume)

- “The Soviet Shtetl: Ideology, Scholarship, Memory” (single-author monograph)
- “Jewish Nationalist or Ukrainian Nationalist? From the NKVD Files of Demographer I.I. Veitsblit, 1895-1937” (single-author article)

Forthcoming

Statistical Interpretation and the Politics of Jewish Suffering: Revisiting the Scholarship of Ilia Veitsblit (1895-1937)" [in Russian] in *Soviet Judaica: History, Problematics, Personalities* (Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow, forthcoming 2016).

Published Articles

“After An-sky: I.M. Pul’ner and the Jewish Section of the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad” in Jeffrey Veidlinger, ed., *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse* (Indiana University Press, 2016): 119-145.

“The Shtetl in the Museum: Representing Jews in the Eras of Stalin and Putin” in *East European Jewish Affairs* (2015) Vol. 45, Issue 2-3: 174-189.

“The So-Called ‘Jewish’ *Mestechko*: the Shtetl, Bolshevik Ideology and Soviet Ethnography during the Interwar Period [in Russian]. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 102 [New Literary Review] (June 2010): 145-157. Published in print and on-line at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/102/ia12.html>.

“Documenting the ‘New Red *Kasrilevke*’: Shtetl Ethnography as Revolutionary Narrative.” *East European Jewish Affairs* 37/3 (December 2007): 353-375.

“‘On the Social-Economic Front’: The Polemics of Shtetl Research During the Stalin Revolution.” *Science in Context* 20/2 (June 2007): 239-301.

Online Publications

“B.Z. Goldberg’s Letter to The New Palestine.” *Doing Wissenschaft: The Active Study of Judaism as Practice, 1818-2018*. Online Exhibition from the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies 2014-2015. <http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/cajs/fellows15/cajs2015.html>. Published June 2015.

"Margolis, Osher Leibovich" in The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Margolis_Osher_Leibovich). Published August 2010.

Published Book Reviews

Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine*. 424 pp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. *Russian Review* 73:4 (October 2014): 648-649.

Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. 253 pp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 80:2 (Spring 2011): 259-261.

V.A. Dymshits, A.L. L'vov and A.V. Sokolova, eds., *Shtetl XXI vek (polevye issledovaniia)* [The Shtetl of the 21st Century: Field Research]. 292 pp. St. Petersburg: European University in St. Petersburg, 2008. *East European Jewish Affairs* 40/2 (2010): 176-182.

Arkadi Zel'tser, *Evrei sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki 1917-1941* [Jews of the Soviet Provinces: Vitebsk and the Shtetls, 1917-1941]. 478 pp. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006. ISBN 5824307814. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10/1 (Winter 2009): 194-204.

May 10, 2016

Recommendation on behalf of Deborah Yalen

(b) (6)



(b) (6)



Jeffrey Veidlinger
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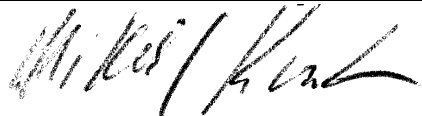
May 25, 2016

NEH Fellowship Program

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