NEH Application Cover Sheet (FA-252507)
Fellowships for University Teachers

PROJECT DIRECTOR
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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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Jeffrey Veidlinger
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History and Judaic Studies
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jveidlin@umich.edu
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: Interdisciplinary: Jewish Studies

Field of Project #2: History: Russian History

Field of Project #3: 

Project Director Field of Study: History: Russian History

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

Institutional Affiliation

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

Institution Name: Colorado State University

Street 1: Department of History

Street 2: Clark Building B362, Campus Delivery 1776

City: Fort Collins

County: Larimer

State: CO: Colorado

Province: 

Country: USA: UNITED STATES

Zip / Postal Code: 80523-1776

DUNS Number: (b) (4)

Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN): (b) (4)

Status: ☑ Senior Scholar ☐ Junior Scholar
Reference Letters

Reference 1

First Name: Mikhail
Last Name: Krutikov
Email: krutikov@umich.edu
Title: Professor
Department Name: Slavic Languages & Literatures
Institution: University of Michigan

Reference 2

First Name: Jeffrey
Last Name: Veidlinger
Email: jveidlin@umich.edu
Title: Professor
Department Name: History and Judaic Studies
Institution: University of Michigan

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: 

Tracking Number: GRANT12154682
Funding Opportunity Number: 20160428-FA Received Date: Apr 28, 2016 07:55:10 PM EDT
Ilieologies 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 disinfranchised 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.

“Ilieologies 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

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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
extensive array of archival materials that will be featured in "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)


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

Cvetkovski, Roland, and Alexis Hofmeister, eds. Empire of Others: Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR. Central European University Press, 2014.


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
  (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

Published Articles


Online Publications


Published Book Reviews


May 10, 2016

Recommendation on behalf of Deborah Yalen
Jeffrey Veidlinger
Director, Frankel Center for Judaic Studies
Joseph Brodsky Collegiate Professor of History and Judaic Studies

(b) (6)
May 25, 2016

NEH Fellowship Program
Mikhail Krutikov,
Professor of Slavic and Judaic Studies,
Chair, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures