



**2013 -2014 TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT**

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Final Report: Serfs and Slaves in the Post-Emancipation Imagination (1861-1915)

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Research Abstract

My dissertation, “Serfs and Slaves in the Post-Emancipation Imagination (1861-1915),” is the first comparative analysis of mass-oriented and commercial representations of serfs and slaves in Russia and the United States. I explore the ways in which Russians and Americans of particular historical experiences deployed such images in literature, poetry, periodical press publications, advertisements, and paintings during the fifty years that followed the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and slavery in 1865. My analysis of the production, dissemination, and consumption of representations of bondsmen before and after emancipation reveals the distinct ways in which citizens of both countries responded to the changes wrought by abolition, struggled to incorporate former bondsmen into the social order, and shaped collective memories of serfdom and slavery.

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Research Objectives

My central research objective is to contrast representations of Russian serfs and peasants and African-American slaves and freedpeople in order to illuminate the evolving ways in which Russians and Americans understood their relationships with the former bondsmen during the post-emancipation era. The abolition of serfdom and slavery were pivotal events that inaugurated a half-century of significant change. Emancipation freed two enslaved groups of people, but freedom proved to be disquieting as the former bondsmen, suddenly citizens, or *poddannye* in Russia, strove for integration into the national polity. As acts of social engineering, the abolition of serfdom and slavery altered fundamental relationships that had characterized Russian and American society. Prior to emancipation, masters and bondsmen defined their economic and social roles in relation to one another; however, these relationships were transformed by freedom, which forced the reformation of their respective identities. This revolution of roles proved to be one step toward other fundamental changes, as the fifty years following the dual emancipations were distinguished by industrialization and geographic expansion. These phenomena transformed both nations, inducing anxieties in each country's populace about their histories and paths of development. Reflecting upon these substantial changes, an important way in which Russians and Americans defined themselves and their national characteristics was through their depictions of former bondsmen in mass media.

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During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, representations of Russian peasants appeared in a broad range of published or widely disseminated materials including the poetry of Nikolai Nekrasov; the literature of Nikolai Leskov, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Leo Tolstoi; the plays of Aleksei Pisemskii and Anton Chekhov; illustrated journals such as *Field*, *World Illustration*, and *Dragonfly*; paintings produced by the Wanderers; and advertisements on brightly colored posters and ephemera. By focusing on these materials, I seek to comprehend the goals of the men and women who produced these visual and textual images as well as the reactions of the Russian citizens who consumed them. Ultimately, it is my hope that these findings will illuminate how cultural representations shaped Russian popular opinion toward the peasantry and subsequently influenced the dynamics of the societal integration of freed serfs during an era of industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and geographic expansion.

Research Activities

A Title VIII Research Scholar Grant funded seven months of archival research for my dissertation. Between August 2013 and December 2013, I lived in St. Petersburg, Russia. There, I worked in two different branches of the Russian National Library where I searched for representations of serfs and peasants in the library's entire archival collection of pre-revolutionary posters (*plakaty*). In total, I photographed and catalogued a database of over one hundred images depicting rural and urban peasants in advertisements for cigarettes, agricultural equipment, beer, and rubber-soled shoes. My research in the ephemera collection of the Russian National Library was also fruitful; there, I collected images of peasants in late nineteenth-century

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ephemera for 125 distinct products including chocolate bars, caramels, other assorted candies, cigarettes, soap, cookies, and tea. Finally, I supplemented the diverse images from the poster and ephemera collections with a few dozen depictions of peasants from newspaper advertisements (1880-1913) in *Russian Word*, *Petersburg Sheet*, and *Russian Record*.

In the journal archive of the Russian National Library, I searched for short stories about and printed illustrations of peasants in numerous publications including *Field*, *World Illustration*, *Dragonfly*, and *Twinkle*. Some of my finest discoveries were located in the literary supplement to the *Moscow Sheet*; issues of this supplement are rare in the United States and contain fascinating and unique tales about changing peasant life in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russia. In total, I collected, recorded, or analyzed nearly 150 images and stories about serfs and peasants from the aforementioned illustrated journals.

Between December 2013 and March 2014, I conducted the second phase of my research in Moscow, Russia. There, I divided my time between the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), the archive of the State Tretyakov Gallery, and the Russian State Library. In these locations, I studied a broad range of primary sources relating to the production, dissemination, and reception of textual and visual depictions of Russian serfs.

In the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, I examined correspondence, memoirs, diary entries, and critical reviews in the *fondy* of Russia's most influential authors including Aleksei Pisemskii, Nikolai Nekrasov, Nikolai Leskov, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Anton

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Chekhov. Each of these men produced distinct representations of the peasantry in his literature, poetry, and plays that influenced public perceptions of and attitudes toward Russia's former serfs. In the first two decades following emancipation, Pisemskii, Nekrasov, and Tolstoi sought to evoke empathy in readers through their sympathetic or sentimental portrayals of serfs and peasants. Notable works include Pisemskii's *A Bitter Fate* (1859), Nekrasov's "Peasant Children" (1861) and "Who Can Live Happy and Well in Russia," (1873-1877) and Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877). By contrast, journalist Leskov and satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin offered more complex and nuanced depictions of the peasantry in fictional works like *Life of a Peasant Woman* (1863) and *The Golovlyov Family* (1880). As mawkish depictions of the peasantry declined toward the end of the nineteenth century, Chekhov provided a dose of pessimistic realism in his descriptions of the peasantry in short stories like *Peasants* (1897) and plays such as *The Cherry Orchard* (1904).

The Tretyakov State Gallery houses a robust collection of *vospominaniya* (personal recollections), correspondence, critical reviews, and much more pertaining to the work of a group of painters known as The Wanderers (*Peredvizhniki*). In an era of artistic production dominated by an emphasis on classical, mythological, or religious themes, the Wanderers joined together to create art that depicted Russia's peasants, national history, and rich folk culture. To introduce their work to the widest possible audience, they organized traveling exhibitions which brought their paintings both to urbanites in large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as rural peasants in smaller towns. Finally, they permitted the reproduction and distribution of their

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paintings on postcards and in illustrated journals that reached the far corners of the vast Russian empire during the late nineteenth century. In the Tretyakov Gallery, I perused the extensive files of artists including Ivan Kramskoi, Ilya Repin, Vasilii Perov, Vasilii Maksimov, Gregorii Myasoedov, Abram Arkhipov, Filipp Malyavin, and Viktor Vasnetsov, as well as the files of Gallery founder Pavel Tretyakov, whose generous patronage supported their artistic endeavors.

Finally, at the Russian State Library, I scoured hundreds of nineteenth-century literary and artistic journals to locate and analyze critical reviews that revealed the Russian public's responses to works of fiction, poetry, plays, short stories, and paintings that depicted the peasantry in varying ways. Publications including *Russian Wealth*, *New World*, *The Contemporary*, *World of God*, *The Bee*, *Russian Antiquity*, *Russian Archive*, *Russian Conversation*, *Notes from the Fatherland* offer valuable information about the ways in which Russian readers interpreted and responded to important literary works containing diverse depictions of the peasantry.

Research Findings

My research findings shed light upon the goals and viewpoints of the writers, artists, and businessmen who portrayed the peasantry in their literature, paintings, journals, and advertisements, as well as the evolving responses of the Russian public to these works during the decades that followed the abolition of serfdom. Idealistic visual representations of former serfs in idyllic rural village settings filled the pages of illustrated journals between 1860 and 1880.

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Dressed in their finest holiday attire, peasants announced the arrival of religious holidays such as Christmas, Maslenitsa, and Easter on the front pages of corresponding issues. Publishers also employed images of the peasantry to herald the changing of the seasons; for example, journal articles celebrating the arrival of spring or the year's first snow often featured portrayals of cheerful, contented peasants that accompanied stories or sentimental poems about rural life. During an era of national reform and increased urbanization, such images served as symbols of Russia's historic and religious traditions. As Russia modernized and its cities expanded, editors printed nostalgic illustrations of peasants that likely appealed to educated, urban readers whose modern lives were removed from those of former serfs living in isolated villages.

In the 1860s and 1870s, playwright Aleksei Pisemskii, poet Nikolai Nekrasov, and novelist Leo Tolstoi presented sympathetic or idealistic depictions of the former serfs that complemented the wistful images published in contemporaneous journals. Pisemskii, writing on the eve of emancipation, produced the first play to dramatize the hardships of serfdom and the uneven power dynamics between master and peasant. Nekrasov also sought to inspire compassion in his peers for "the sufferings of the people" and to highlight peasant virtues in poems such as *Peasant Children* (1861) and *Who is Happy in Russia?* (1863-1876), written in the lively style of a Russian folk song.¹ During the late 1870s, as forces of modernity continued to exert pressure upon Russia and the political Populist movement grew in strength, Leo Tolstoi raised up the simple, Christian peasant in *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877) as an example of a model

¹ Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 229.

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Russian citizen. He believed that peasants possessed unique qualities that non-peasants, including members of the nobility, ought to cultivate in themselves. Together, these three writers helped bring peasants to the forefront of the public's consciousness through their empathetic writing.

After emancipation, images of peasants flooded the public sphere through another medium, painting. Members of the peasant estate joined educated intellectuals to form the Society for Traveling Art Exhibitions, a group of artists who created emotional portraits of peasant life that were exhibited in cities and villages around the nation. These *Peredvizhniki*, or "Wanderers," sought to turn Russia's attention to the joys and sorrows of the *narod*, or folk, through scenes of peasant rituals and celebrations, fires that devastated villages, impoverished families living in decrepit huts, harvest and threshing scenes, and much more. They also chronicled the major changes that shaped village life in late nineteenth-century Russia by painting scenes of children and adults learning to read in newly constructed public schools, peasant migration and resettlement, and men engaging in non-agricultural industries like railroad construction, mining, and mechanics. It is no coincidence that many of these representations were produced by men like Vasilii Maksimov, Filipp Malyavin, and Ilya Repin, who were members of the peasant estate. Although few peasants made significant contributions to literature produced during the 1860s and 1870s, a statistic that may be attributed to the lack of literacy among rural populations, peasants like Maksimov, Malyavin, and Repin each studied in

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icon-painting workshops as children, opportunities that launched their artistic careers and ultimately enabled them to share their unique perspectives of village life with the world.

It is important to note that not all depictions of the peasantry in the 1860s and 1870s were empathetic, idealized, or sentimental. For example, during the 1870s, the satirical journal *Dragonfly* bucked this trend by depicting peasants as inebriated, slovenly, and lazy in humorous cartoons and sketches. In addition, the journalist Nikolai Leskov and satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, a Russian “Mark Twain,” offered more nuanced and sometimes critical depictions of the peasantry in their short stories and novels. By the 1890s, idealized depictions of the peasantry began to fall out of favor and writers like Anton Chekhov turned to realism in their depictions of former serfs. In 1897, Chekhov shocked readers with his short story *Peasants*, which described an impoverished, apathetic, drunken group of peasants living in a filthy village hut. Far from serving as model Russian citizens, Chekhov’s flawed peasants possessed recognizable and tragic human weaknesses. Collectively, these three writers’ diverse portrayals acted as an important counterweight to the abundance of nostalgic or sympathetic peasant representations during the twenty years that followed emancipation.

The final years of the nineteenth century heralded rapid transformation and new types of peasant imagery. Boundaries blurred between modern cities and traditional villages as industrialization, urbanization, and the lure of wages from factory jobs increasingly drew male peasants from their homes to urban areas. Migration and industrialization led to the creation of a

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consumer society in Russia, as city workers earning wages found themselves with disposable income and increased purchasing power that enabled them to buy non-essential or even luxury products to keep for themselves or to send back to villages where their families remained. As manufacturing productivity increased, prices dropped and buyers could afford to select from a growing assortment of items.

Businessmen sought to capture a new consumer base, composed of urban peasants, through advertisements designed to appeal directly to them. These pragmatic, profit-minded men increasingly portrayed peasants as independent, decisive consumers in order to encourage them to buy their products. For example, while posters depicting agricultural scenes from the late 1880s showed groups of peasants working under the watch of wealthy overseers, posters from the early twentieth century depicted peasants as independent farmers who managed their own plots of land and discussed equipment purchases directly with merchants. Other types of advertisements reference the physical transformation that rural peasants made upon arriving in cities. Numerous *plakaty* feature smartly dressed urban peasants instructing naïve, slovenly rural peasants about the latest fashion trends for clothing and shoes. Perhaps most striking, however, are advertisements that depict urban peasants in positions of relative equality as consumers. For example, advertisements of the early twentieth century show urban peasants, wealthy merchants, and aristocrats smoking the same brand of cigarettes or drinking beers together. Such posters may have appealed to peasants' aspirations for social mobility.

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Russia's economic development was disrupted by the 1905 Revolution, an event that was partly caused by the explosion of tensions among urban peasants and workers. Although I originally intended to conclude my research with a study of the 1905 Revolution, my archival research in illustrated journals led to the discovery of an abundance of materials documenting the 50th anniversary celebrations of the emancipation of the serfs in 1911. While many scholars have studied Russia's collective memories of World War I and World War II, surprisingly little work has been done on emancipation commemorations. By contrast, American scholars have produced robust analyses of commemorations of the abolition of slavery. Consequently, I have decided to expand the scope of my dissertation by eight years, ending in 1915 rather than 1905, in order to compare images of former serfs and slaves in American and Russian 50th-anniversary commemorations of emancipation. I believe that this analysis will be useful to transnational and Russian historians alike.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

My analysis of the historical processes of the absorption of special populations through the lens of cultural representations in different media contributes to a body of knowledge that assists analysts in developing effective regional integration policies. As the two largest migrant destinations in the world, Russia and the United States currently grapple with questions of identity, citizenship and assimilation. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the recent flow of ethnic minorities entering Russia as "guest workers" have produced contemporary dislocations comparable to those of the mid-late nineteenth century. According to a 2006 World

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Bank Migration Report, some twelve million foreigners currently reside in Russia; three million residents are undocumented.²

Their presence in major cities is noticeable; a recent newspaper article describes how “Moscow’s migrants might be spotted on any day toiling at the city’s hundreds of construction sites, markets, warehouses, restaurants, and municipal services.”³ Many Russians perceive these immigrants as having displaced local populations in the labor market and caused an increase in crime and infectious disease rates.⁴ Despite their essential contribution to urban economies, “growing numbers of non-Slavic immigrants . . . resented and – by some – hated.”⁵ Some native Russians have even responded to the influx of ethnic minorities with violence and rioting; guest workers on public buses were attacked by protestors with stones and smoke pellets in Moscow in May 2012 and anti-immigration tensions flared violently during a major race riot in October 2013.⁶ They remain largely unintegrated into the broader population, a problem that Russian policymakers have been reluctant to address. In fact, a Russian official from the Federal Migration Service declared that migrants should “account for no more than 20% of people living in Russia,” while Vladimir Putin has called for the protection of “the interests of the native

² “Migration in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,” June 11th, 2008, *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/283/migration-in-eastern-europe-and-central-asia.html>

³ “Russia Needs Immigrants, But Can It Accept Them?” October 27th, 2013, *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://m.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/1027/Russia-needs-immigrants-but-can-it-accept-them>

⁴ For survey results, see Aleksandr Kurakin, “Problema gastarbaĭterov v Rossii,” *Evraziĭskii Dom*, July 9th, 2008. <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/socials.xml?lang=ru&nic=socials&pid=44>

⁵ “Russia Needs Immigrants, But Can It Accept Them?” October 27th, 2013, *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://m.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/1027/Russia-needs-immigrants-but-can-it-accept-them>

⁶ See “Guest Workers Attacked in Moscow,” *English Russia*, May 20th, 2012, <http://englishrussia.com/2012/05/20/guest-workers-attacked-in-moscow/>

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population.” Ultimately, without the implementation of significant reforms to reduce ethnic tensions, the *Christian Science Monitor* ominously predicts that “serious unrest . . . is almost certainly in the offing.”⁷

My examination of the effect of nineteenth-century media representations of Russian peasants offers several possible ideas for contemporary policymakers. If officials want to encourage the societal integration of migrant workers and other non-Slavic immigrants, it is essential to feature their families, cultures, and experiences in mass media within the public sphere. There are numerous opportunities for doing so. For example, there is a great deal of advertising space in highly trafficked places such as extensive urban subway systems. Current state-sponsored posters feature photographs of monuments such as Peter the Great or the Church of Christ the Savior with slogans exclaiming, “We Love Our City!” In addition, unused advertising space is filled by generic and redundant posters of bright flowers, dolphins, islands, or waterfalls. One idea is for local governments to utilize ad space to display new images of urban street scenes depicting Slavic and non-Slavic residents enjoying cities’ amenities side by side, as early twentieth-century posters featured urban peasants smoking and drinking with wealthy Russian elites. Such harmonious images could make Slavic denizens feel more

⁷ “Russia Needs Immigrants, But Can It Accept Them?” October 27th, 2013, *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://m.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/1027/Russia-needs-immigrants-but-can-it-accept-them>

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comfortable with changing urban compositions and hearten non-Slavic immigrants who sometimes “tend to be invisible to the Slavic Russian majority.”⁸

Arts institutions like the State Tretyakov Gallery, the State Russian Museum, the Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art, the Moscow House of Photography, and the Russian National Library could draw inspiration from the *Peredvizhniki*, the group of intellectuals and former peasants who united to create art featuring the experiences of Russia’s former serfs. These modern organizations might consider funding and featuring exhibitions of artistic works produced by non-Slavic immigrants that depict their experiences as migrant workers or their national and ethnic histories, cultures, and traditions. For example, in the fall of 2013, the Russian National Library hosted an exhibit depicting photographs of egalitarian Swedish family life. One could imagine the Library sponsoring a similar kind of exhibition of photographs showing the private lives and experiences of non-Slavic immigrants. Such displays could provide Slavic citizens with the opportunity to learn more about the numerous ethnic groups that comprise Russia’s population and form the fabric of their society.

Co-Curricular Activities

While working in Saint Petersburg, Russia, I participated in a weekly writing seminar at my sponsoring university, the European University in St. Petersburg. There, I had the pleasure of presenting my research comparing and contrasting Russian serfdom and American slavery. It

⁸ “Russia Needs Immigrants, But Can It Accept Them?” October 27th, 2013, *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://m.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/1027/Russia-needs-immigrants-but-can-it-accept-them>

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was wonderful to discuss and debate the similarities and differences between these two historical institutions. In addition, I attended many departmental events at the European University in St. Petersburg and greatly value the connections I made with fellow scholars and professors. Finally, in my spare time, I sang in a local Russian choir several evenings a week and participated in performances for a charitable organization and for governmental officials.

Concluding Statements and Plans for Future Research Agenda, Presentations, and Publications

Upon returning to the United States, I will begin the American archival portion of my dissertation research. I plan to work in archives located in Virginia, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, New York, Washington, DC, and Massachusetts. In the coming months, I am scheduled to present my research at seminars and national conferences in North Carolina, Maryland, and New York. As I synthesize my findings, I expect to submit at least one article for publication in an academic journal. In the spring of 2016, I plan to defend my dissertation at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and to prepare my research for publication as a monograph that I will deposit in Russian libraries and universities.

My comparative and transnational evaluation of these cultural representations, which increases understanding between Russian and America by shedding light on their common experiences, would not have been possible without the generosity of American Councils and the U.S. Department of State's Title VIII Research Scholar program. Through their support, American Councils staff helped mitigate the logistical challenges of living and conducting



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research in Russia. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to American Councils for its investment in my research and training as a specialist in Russian and American history.

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