

ASEEES NewsNet



Skeletons in the Closet: Queering Marxist-Leninist Archaeology

By Kate Mower

3

Interview with Eugene M. Avrutin, incoming Slavic Review Editor

22

Two Men Who Gave Freedom: The Assassination of Alexander II in the Context of Russian-American Relations

by E. Thomas Ewing and De’Vonte Tinsley

27

55th Annual ASEES Convention

ASEES Members Reflect on the Value of the ASEES Convention

2023 ASEES Prize Winners

Member Spotlight

New ACLS Publication: “Before the First Day of Graduate School”

New ASEES Study: “The State of Russian Studies in the United States: 2022”

Member News

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Cover Photo: Kate Mower, “Archaeological site in Constanta, Romania,” February 2022.

Note: The views expressed in NewsNet articles are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ASEES or its staff.

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Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies (ASEES), established in 1948, is a nonprofit, nonpolitical, scholarly society and is the leading private organization dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about Russia, Central Eurasia, and Eastern & Central Europe.

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National History and Archaeology Museum in Constanta, Romania

Skeletons in the Closet: Queering Marxist-Leninist Archaeology

by Kate Mower

been asked numerous times by members of the older generation of archaeologists, many of whom have been excavating in Constanta for decades. Indeed, it came as no surprise to them that the only person interested in the human remains of the museum would be the American working here. “Of course the American would have such a perverse interest,” they scoffed.

My interest in the human remains only grew in response to their lack of interest. “Who wouldn’t care about human remains?” I wondered.

Conservationist Dr. Maria Bolocan expertly navigated the deposit of the [National History and Archaeology Museum in Constanta](#), Romania. Down the stairs and winding through the rows of shelves, she guided me to the shelf we were seeking. This particular deposit (one of three in the museum) hosts more than 50,000 artifacts from the ancient world from across Constanta County and its Black Sea coast. The ancient Greeks settled a number of colonies along this coast, including Tomis, now called Constanta. The Romans followed. The collection at the museum, where I have spent the last two years researching and working, is vast and overwhelming. But the crate we were looking for on this particular day houses a small collection of artifacts that are extremely rare for this museum, rarer even than gold, according to the museum inventory. This crate contains human remains.

This museum holds thousands upon thousands of funerary artifacts, including gold and silver objects and giant funerary urns, but only three sets of human remains. “Who cares about the skeletons?” I have



Dr. Maria Bolocan examining the skull

Over the course of my fieldwork in Romania, I have learned that it was common practice during the communist period for archaeologists to disregard the human remains they found, taking measurements and notes primarily about the material objects near them. After the site was documented, the archaeologists would rebury the human remains with the soil – in archaeological practice, this process is called “backfilling.”

To be sure, some remains were collected and preserved. Some were sent to Bucharest to be housed at the Institute of Anthropology. In Constanta, though,

communist-era archaeologists by and large did not prioritize preserving human remains. There are a number of reasons for this, ranging from financial constraints to religious beliefs. In some cases, archaeologists believed that the sacredness of bodies deserved sensitive reinternment rather than storage in a museum crate, a longstanding practice in the West for which museums across the US and UK in particular are now being held accountable. Perhaps most notable, though, was that these archaeologists simply could not arrive at a consensus about the importance of preserving human remains.

Romanian archaeologists during the communist period found themselves caught between two distinct ideological, methodological, and theoretical schools of archaeological thought. On the one hand, they had historically adopted and contributed to the culture-historical archaeological methods widely utilized by archaeologists in western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this tradition, ethnicity was considered the most important factor shaping human history; with regard to archaeology, ethnicity was determined based on assumptions of biological difference identified in human remains. On the other hand, after World War II, the new communist order in Romania dictated that archaeologists abide by Soviet archaeological principles. Developed hastily in the 1930s, the Marxist-Leninist approach to archaeology lacked standardization and changed frequently based on new decrees from Stalin, yet often involved critiques of culture-historical archaeology, claiming that its reliance on presumed biological difference in the archaeological record was “bourgeois science” and racist. According to Stalin’s interpretation of Marxist-Leninism, class was the most important factor in human history. Marxist-Leninist archaeology therefore required, above all else, a class interpretation – which did not require human remains, but rather cultural objects and other features of burial sites.

In 1950, the newly restructured Romanian Academy – modeled after the Soviet Academy rather than the French Academy – began publishing several new scientific journals. Stalin dictated that Romanian scientists publish scientific research in these new journals and send the texts, with abstracts in Russian, to the Soviet dictator himself for review. If Romanian archaeologists wanted to keep their jobs (and many lost theirs), they would have to adopt Marxist-Leninist methods and theories.

Many Romanian archaeologists (though not all) privately opposed these changes – not least because they had built their careers and international networks around culture-historical approaches – and resisted them in their excavations, but nonetheless worked to incorporate them into their published professional work. During those first years of mandated archaeological publication, Romanian archaeologists grumbled and experimented. They were not ready to abandon culture-historical archaeological theory for Marxist-Leninism entirely, but did begin to use Marxist-Leninist language to build critiques of western archaeological methods as well as – paradoxically and subtly - Marxist-Leninism itself.

When seen in historical perspective, contemporary critiques of biological determinism resemble those posed by Soviet archaeologists and others in the communist Bloc.

In a 1950 reflection on the state of the field, for example, archaeologist Dumitru Berciu lamented the fact that neither culture-historical approaches nor Marxist-Leninist approaches addressed underlying problems in Romanian archaeology: “The lack of studies in ethnography and paleoanthropology” – the study of human evolution through bones – “reflects negatively on the ancient history of our homeland. The osteological material” – bones – “from the excavations so far has not yet been the subject of specialized research, so the historian cannot have precise data at hand for the reconstruction of ... the historical development of human society on our country’s territory.” Berciu even quotes Stalin directly to make this point, citing an unidentified source: “It is impossible to move forward and advance science without subjecting outdated theses and opinions of established specialists to critical analysis.” Berciu thus simultaneously critiques his field’s oversimplified and problematic approach to studying human remains (in line with Soviet thought), while nonetheless arguing for the importance of preserving them from an ethnonational perspective.

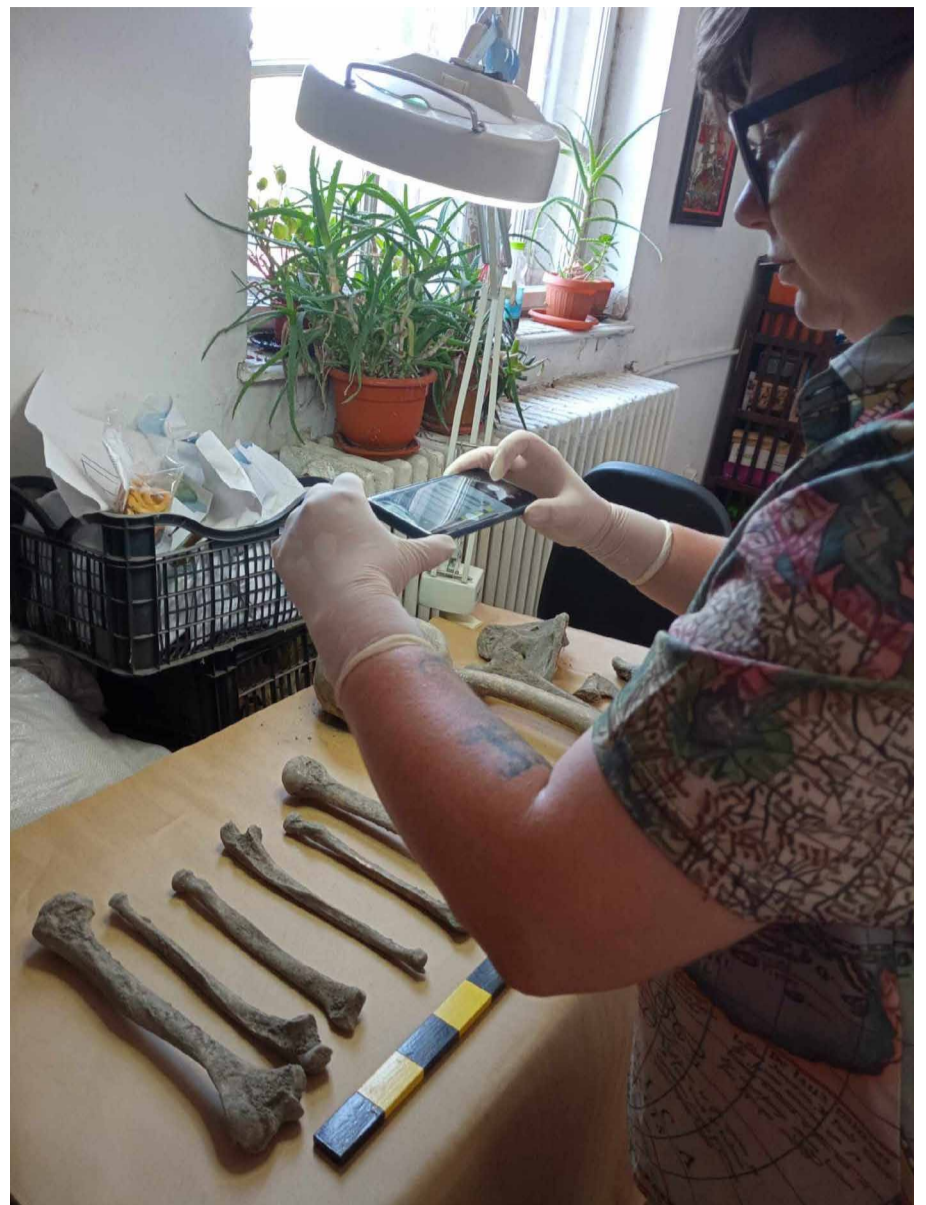
Western scientists today are grappling with the long,

entangled history of racism, sexism, and biological determinations in science. When seen in historical perspective, however, contemporary critiques of biological determinism in critical race theory and queer theory often resemble those posed by Soviet archaeologists and others in the communist Bloc. Critical race theory argues that separating human remains into categories of ancestry, heritage, ethnicity, and race based on biological difference artificially tries to stabilize – even fix and mandate – what we know to be unstable and socially constructed categories. Queer theory adds the categories of gender and sex to that list and asserts that determining the sex of human remains tries to stabilize another unstable category of social difference.

While many western European archaeologists of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century made biological determinations about the sex of human remains at archaeological sites, there were some European anthropologists already problematizing binary sex difference categorization. In 1915, for example, German geneticist Richard Goldschmidt published his findings on sex difference, concluding that sex difference was not a strict binary (according to some scholars, he also coined the term “intersex” in that text). While such work had little impact on the practice of sex differentiation of human remains in western European archaeology, it did factor into scientific work in communist-era Romania.

Marxist-Leninism's disregard for the study of human remains made space for more nuanced theorizations of biological sex.

In a 1956 article in the Romanian journal *Probleme de Antropologie*, Romanian endocrinologist and anthropologist, Ștefan-Marius Milcu, along with two of his colleagues, outlined a methodology for making sex differentiation assignments for excavated bones. The article proposed a more nuanced sex differentiation methodology for calculating the probability of the sex of human remains, and specifically outlined the existence of intersex conditions. The article is explicit about its limitations; in fact, Milcu noted that his probability model had an accuracy rate of only 70%. In practice, Marxist-Leninism's



Kate Mower examining bones held in the museum in Constanta

disregard for the study of human remains made space for more nuanced theorizations of biological sex such as Milcu's.

As a result, in the cases where human remains were collected for analysis at Romanian archaeological sites, they were less likely to be subjected to sex differentiation based on binary biological determinations. One set of excavation reports from the museum in Constanta evinces the fluidity of sex and gender in Romanian archaeological thought during the communist period. While I was in the process of writing this article, Dr. Bolocan was examining a vase in the museum in preparation for an exhibit in Bucharest when she noticed inside there was a skull fragment, a very rare happenstance indeed. We eventually came across the archaeological reports about its unearthing. The 1961 report for its 1959 excavation concluded that the vase interred the remains of “a girl about two years old.”

The skeletal remains of a child do not provide a definitive determination for sex; therefore, even in western archaeology, the skeletal remains of children are never

sexed. Instead, gender and age – but not sex – was determined based on the grave goods accompanying this skull fragment. By contrast, the report did not offer conclusions about the gender or age of the two intact adult human skeletons found alongside the skull fragment, apparently because no grave goods were found near them. As this example shows, communist-era Romanian archaeologists were more comfortable determining gender on the basis of a small skull fragment accompanied by material objects than determining sex based on intact, adult skeletal remains.

My bias comes from a long history of privileging biological determinism as standard scientific endeavor.

As I have learned in Romania, the collection of and fascination with human remains is far from a universal one, even among archaeologists. Why did I think it was necessary to collect human remains for examination? The uncomfortable truth is that my bias comes from a long history of privileging biological determinism as standard scientific endeavor. My cultural background led me to assume that bodies are vessels of data collection, an assumption rooted in an ethnonationalist telling of history. Hopefully it is not too late for the humanist in me to tap into a new paradigm where I privilege the ethereal of the body rather than the data.



Kate Mower is a PhD candidate in the History Department at the University of California, Riverside. They have an MA degree in Ancient Mediterranean History. After a dual-country Fulbright research grant in Romania and Bulgaria, they shifted their research focus to the history of archaeology

during communism in Romania. They have excavated at a Roman villa site in Deva, Romania as well as with the University of Bucharest team at Histria. Their dissertation focuses on the creation of archaeological interpretations and methodologies by western imperial scholars, Romanian archaeologists, village laborers, public figures, and public observers, mainly in the Dobrogea region of contemporary Romania and Bulgaria. Kate is an American Councils Title VIII research scholar and an ASEEES Dissertation Research Grant recipient. The Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanta (MINAC) has graciously provided them a research home in Constanta, Romania.

ASEEES FALL 2023

Research Meetup Series

SHARING PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AND FIELDWORK

Join us to share practical tips, logistical questions, and local resources!

Please note that these events are open to ASEEES members only.

Doing Research in the Baltic Countries (in partnership with the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies)

Friday, September 29
12:00PM EDT

Doing Research in Former Yugoslavia

Wednesday, October 25
12:00PM EDT

www.aseees.org/research-meetup-series



Contact leah_aseees@pitt.edu with questions or to volunteer to moderate future meetups.

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Applications for Spring 2024 are due October 15, 2023

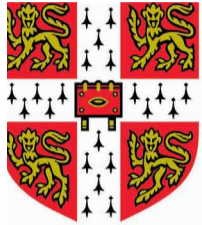
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55th Annual ASEEES Convention

Nov. 30 - Dec. 3, 2023 - Philadelphia, PA
Oct. 19 - 20, 2023 - Virtual

Join ASEEES in celebrating its 75th anniversary
at the 2023 Convention!

Convention theme: [Decolonization](#)



REGISTER TODAY

Deadline to pre-register: **October 17**

All presenters (panelists, discussants, roundtable members, and session chairs) **MUST** [become members](#) and [register](#).

To be included in the index of participants, register by **October 6**.

Pre-registration closes on **October 17** for both the virtual and in-person conventions.

There is no late registration for the virtual convention.

Philadelphia, PA



[Book a room](#) at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown at the [ASEEES discounted room rate](#) until November 7.

Use the [roomshare locator](#) to contact ASEEES members about sharing a room.



[Insider's Guide to Philadelphia](#)

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Online Program

View the [online program](#) for the most up-to-date schedule

[Create your own personal schedule](#) for the convention (note: personal schedules do not sync with ASEEES app).

For instructions for participants in the virtual convention, click [HERE](#).

Session Organizers can request changes to their session using the [Change Request Form](#).

Special Events in Philadelphia

Opening Reception and Exhibit Hall Tour

ASEEES Awards Presentation and President's Address: "Decolonization in Practice" by Juliet Johnson, ASEEES President

Presidential Plenary: "Decolonization in Practice"

Vice Presidential Roundtable: "Decolonization and Liberation: Ukraine's Experiences and Implications for the Region"

Vice President-Designated Roundtable: "Soviet Famine or Famines (1932-34)?: A Reassessment 90 Years after the Holodomor"

ASEEES Annual Meeting of the Members

[Film Screenings](#)

When Spring Came to Bucha (2022, Ukraine)

Away (2022, Ukraine)

Retrospective: Ukrainian-born filmmaker Vyacheslav Vyskovsky (1916-1925)

The Homes We Carry (2022, Germany)

Soviet Camp 0331 (2022, Poland)

Please review the [Code of Conduct](#).



[#ASEEES23](#)

ASEEES MEMBERS REFLECT

On the Value of the ASEEES ConventionVeronica E. Aplenc

Zell/Lurie Real Estate Center,
University of Pennsylvania

Lisa A.
Kirschenbaum

History, West Chester
University

Jacob Ari Labendz

Gross Center for Holocaust
and Genocide Studies,
Ramapo College of New Jersey

Why is the ASEEES convention important to you?

- JL:** Asking a scholar of Central European history why ASEEES is important is like asking ET why he wanted to phone home. I do not mean this in any nostalgic or sentimental way—though I have cultivated many dear friendships at ASEEES and look forward to seeing them annually. I and so many others rely on ASEEES as a primary site of exploration and conversation, where others know both literally and figuratively the languages we speak. Of course, there is a professional side to this as well. In earlier years, I hoped that the right exposure at ASEEES might help me to advance my career. Now I primarily seek partners for projects and new directions of thought... and the usual suspects with whom I pass joyous evenings at the hotel bar.
- LK:** I value the formal sessions and the informal opportunities to catch up with old friends and connect with people that I know only through their work. I always leave reenergized.
- VA:** The ASEEES convention is the only professional meeting—as far as I am aware—that brings together a large number of scholars who present work from an array of fields and on a wide geographic region. This allows for cross-pollination across disciplines and regions that is critical to generating new insights and exciting knowledge.

Are there particular shifts in your work that you would attribute to an ASEEES convention?

- JL:** My approach to my own research has evolved with my experience of ASEEES. I believe that I have been a regular attendee for the past thirteen years. For the first long while, I presented on panels that had national-territorial frames—in my case, Czechoslovakia—or which explored aspects of regional Jewish history. Perhaps this reflects my company more than larger trends, I have noticed a significant shift in panel organization towards themes that transcend these limited (and limiting) arenas. It has been an enlightening challenge, not only to prepare my arguments for a broader scholarly audience, but to design my research to speak meaningfully to bigger questions. ASEEES has demonstrated, time and again, the communal nature of scholarship and knowledge construction. Perhaps I am only witnessing the end of area studies as we knew it... but considering the emergence of ASEEES from that very context, it speaks volumes to the creativity of our society and our fields.

- LK:** An animated discussion at ASEEES about how wonderful it would be to have an English translation of Olga Berggolts' memoir to share with students led me to undertake the translation — something I would never have done without this chance conversation.
- VA:** At the ASEEES conventions in the mid-2000s, I had the opportunity to meet scholars working on Central Europe and our conversations were critical in my gaining a greater understanding of regional similarities and comparative differences. They also proved to be wonderful colleagues as individuals and a real sense of scholarly camaraderie developed among us. Ultimately, working with affiliate presidents, I organized several receptions for all affiliate members at ASEEES conventions in those years, too.

Do you have a favorite memory of a past ASEEES convention?

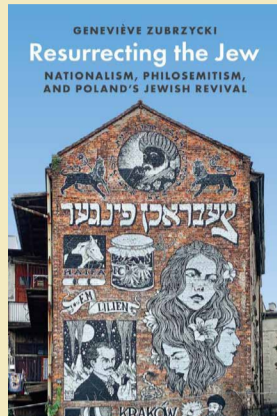
- JL:** I'm not sure that I would call this a "favorite memory," but there is one that sticks out from a number of years ago. Senior colleagues invited me to participate on their panel, which had a relatively ambitious theme. My presentation did not go well. As I looked out on the audience, I caught my friend's eye—a scholar more advanced than me. They gestured to me to slow down... I likely did not. This memory stands out because I learned, in that moment, that this career requires a lifetime of effort; that I had made progress but had much further to go. My experience was, at best, bittersweet in the moment. Looking back, however, it exemplifies the role that ASEEES has played in my scholarly advancement, and why I return year after year. I am happy to report that my fellow panelists have become friends, even as they remain mentors. To that end, I could have noted the welcome I received by two colleagues—then newly minted PhDs, I think—when I attended for the first time as an early graduate student. Their warmth and guidance sustained and supported me. I hope that I have been able to play that role for others, if only in some small way.
- LK:** My favorite memory is of one of my first conventions. I knew almost no one, so I was happy to run into my advisor, Reggie Zelnik, who was distributing little strips of paper with the location of the Berkeley "smoker" — a bar away from the conference hotel. Throughout the conference, Reggie and I happened to keep showing up at the same panels. I remember that at every panel, Reggie asked the most incisive and generous questions that really helped people to develop their ideas. He set an example of conference going that I'm still working to follow.
- VA:** In 2002, I had just embarked on my dissertation research in Ljubljana, Slovenia. As a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania in a field (Folklore) that was not well represented at ASEEES, I traveled to Pittsburgh alone. However, in the two years prior to my fieldwork, I had begun commuting to Columbia in New York City to find interlocutors on Central Europe and had made connections with the "Columbia crowd." One of their faculty invited me to come to the Columbia University reception. I crossed the Atlantic in cramped economy, found my way to the Pittsburgh hotel, and walked into the dark room of the Columbia University reception, hoping I might recognize someone relatively quickly. As I stepped in, Brad Abrams called out, "Everyone, it's Veronica! And she's very interesting!" As fireworks started to light the sky—for some Pittsburgh-sponsored celebration—I thought, all this might just work out.

What do you hope to see at an ASEEES Convention in the future?

- JL:** I would love to see more workshops on public history. This is not only because I currently run a Holocaust and genocide studies center. I have noticed more and more job postings that are looking for candidates with program administration experience. It would benefit the field and our students, I think, if we prepared them for the additional expectations currently placed upon humanities scholars.
- VA:** That it will continue to support new areas of scholarly research, pilot new programs, and so remain a premier organization for scholars of the region.

2023 ASEEEES PRIZE WINNERS

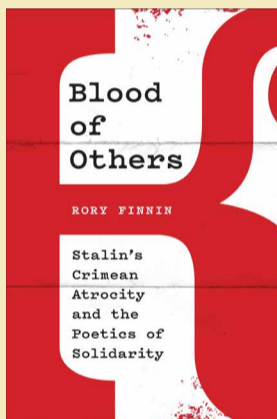
ASEEES congratulates the **2023 prize winners and honorable mentions** for their outstanding scholarship.



Wayne S. Vucinich Book Prize for the most important contribution to Russian, Eurasian, and East European studies in any discipline of the humanities or social sciences

Winner: Geneviève Zubrzycki (University of Michigan)

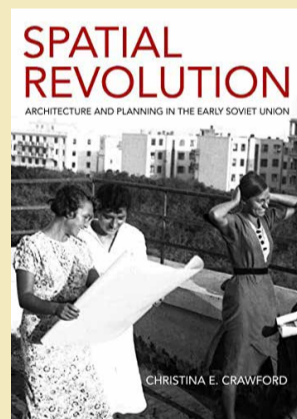
Resurrecting the Jew: Nationalism, Philosemitism, and Poland's Jewish Revival (Princeton University Press)



University of Southern California Book Prize in Literary and Cultural Studies for outstanding monograph published on Russia, Eastern Europe, or Eurasia in the fields of literary and cultural studies

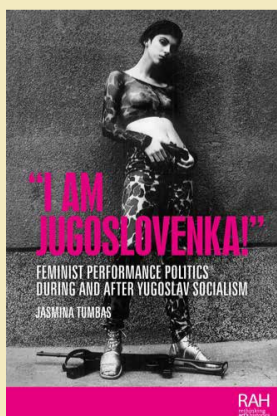
Winner: Rory Finnin (University of Cambridge)

Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity (University of Toronto Press)



Honorable Mention: Christina Crawford (Emory University)

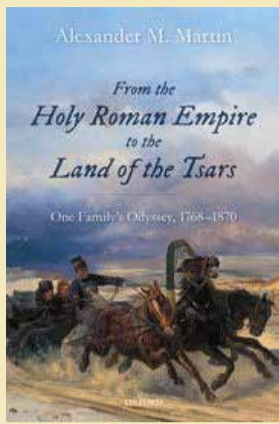
Spatial Revolution: Architecture and Planning in the Early Soviet Union (Cornell University Press)



Barbara Jelavich Book Prize for a distinguished monograph published on any aspect of Southeast European or Habsburg studies since 1600, or nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ottoman or Russian diplomatic history

Winner: Jasmina Tumbas (SUNY Buffalo)

"I am Jugoslovenka!" Feminist Performance Politics During and After Yugoslav Socialism (Manchester University Press)

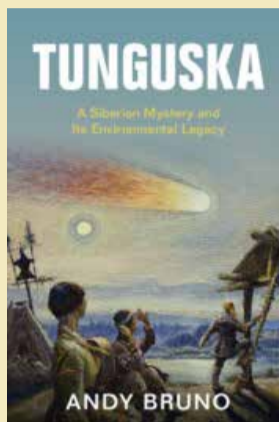


Reginald Zelnik Book Prize in History for outstanding monograph published on Russia, Eastern Europe, or Eurasia in the field of history

Winner: Alexander Martin (University of Notre Dame)

From the Holy Roman Empire to the Land of the Tsars: One Family's Odyssey, 1768-1870 (Oxford University Press)

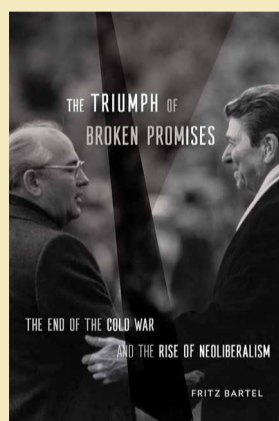
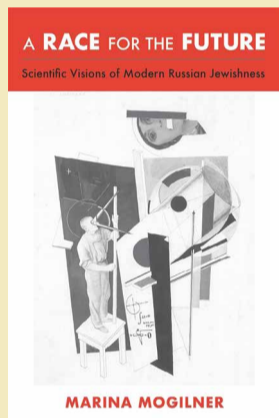
Honorable Mention: Andy Bruno (Northern Illinois University)



Tunguska: A Siberian Mystery and Its Environmental Legacy (Cambridge University Press)

Honorable Mention: Marina Mogilner (University of Illinois at Chicago)

A Race for the Future: Scientific Visions of Modern Russian Jewishness (Harvard University Press)

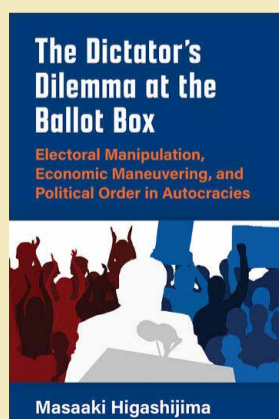


Ed A Hewett Book Prize for outstanding publication on the political economy of Russia, Eurasia, and/or Eastern Europe

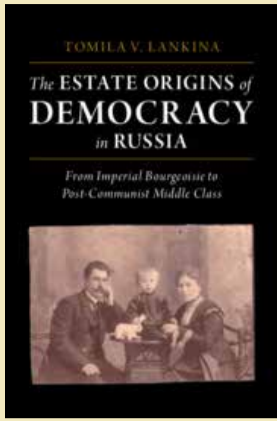
Winner: Fritz Bartel (Texas A&M University)

The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism (Harvard University Press)

Honorable Mention: Masaaki Higashijima (University of Tokyo)



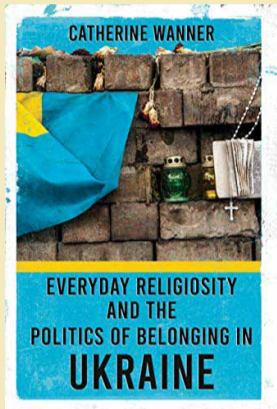
The Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box: Electoral Manipulation, Economic Maneuvering, and Political Order in Autocracies (University of Michigan Press)



Davis Center Book Prize in Political and Social Studies for outstanding monograph on Russia, Eurasia, or Eastern Europe in anthropology, political science, sociology, or geography

Winner: Tomila Lankina (London School of Economics and Political Science)

The Estate Origins of Democracy in Russia: From Imperial Bourgeoisie to Post-Communist Middle Class (Cambridge University Press)



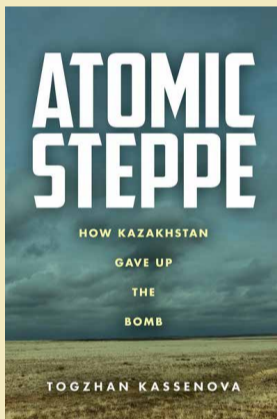
Omeljan Pritsak Book Prize in Ukrainian Studies for a distinguished book in the field of Ukrainian studies

Co-winner: Rory Finnin (University of Cambridge)

Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity (University of Toronto Press)

Co-winner: Catherine Wanner (Pennsylvania State University)

Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine (Cornell University Press)



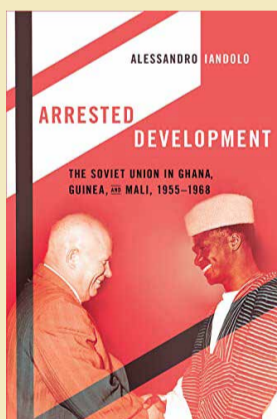
Marshall Shulman Book Prize for an outstanding monograph dealing with the international relations, foreign policy, or foreign-policy decision-making of any of the states of the former Soviet Union or Eastern Europe

Co-winner: Togzhan Kassenova (SUNY Albany)

Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave Up the Bomb (Stanford University Press)

Co-winner: Alessandro Iandolo (University College London)

Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955-1968 (Cornell University Press)



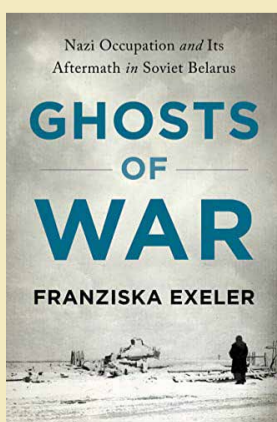
W. Bruce Lincoln Book Prize for an author's first published monograph or scholarly synthesis that is of exceptional merit and lasting significance for the understanding of Russia's past

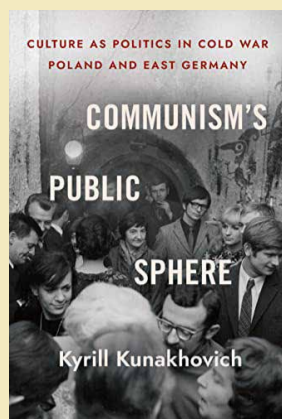
Winner: Alessandro Iandolo (University College London)

Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955-1968 (Cornell University Press)

Honorable Mention: Franziska Exeler (Free University of Berlin, University of Cambridge)

Ghosts of War: Nazi Occupation and Its Aftermath in Soviet Belarus (Cornell University Press)





Kulczycki Book Prize in Polish Studies for the best book in any discipline, on any aspect of Polish affairs

Winner: Kyrill Kunakhovich (University of Virginia)

Communism's Public Sphere: Culture as Politics in Cold War Poland and East Germany (Cornell University Press)

Beth Holmgren Graduate Student Essay Prize for an outstanding essay by a graduate student in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Clayton Marr (The Ohio State University)

“The Angevin-Albanian Element in The Albanian Lexicon”

Robert C. Tucker/Stephen F. Cohen Dissertation Prize for an outstanding English-language doctoral dissertation in Soviet or Post-Soviet politics and history in the tradition practiced by Tucker and Cohen, defended at an American or Canadian university

James Allen Nealy, Jr. (Duke University)

“Making Socialism Work!: The Shchekino Method and the Drive to Modernize Soviet Industry”

CLIR Distinguished Service Award for librarians, archivists or curators whose contributions to the field of Slavic, East European and Eurasian studies librarianship have been especially noteworthy or influential

Sandra Levy (University of Chicago)



Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award

Lynne Viola (University of Toronto)

ASEEES prize winners will be recognized at the award ceremony on Saturday, December 2, 2023 at the Annual Convention. Full citations will be available in the convention program and on the website in November.

NEW FROM SLAVICA PUBLISHERS

Linda Mëniku and Héctor Campos. *Advancing in Albanian*, textbook 451 p., workbook 324 p. (978-089357-518-2, set), \$94.95.

The authors' introductory textbook of Albanian (*Discovering Albanian 1*, U. of Wisconsin Press, 2011) received the AATSEEL award for best annual contribution to language pedagogy. Now Slavica presents their intermediate-advanced textbook, *Advancing in Albanian*, to provide enhanced access for students to one of the major, but less commonly taught European languages. Albanian has been on track to join the EU since 2014, and there are 5 million speakers of this language. The textbook and accompanying workbook transition from English to Albanian as the language of instruction over the course of the year, and are supported by substantial online downloadable

audio files, making it more feasible to achieve proficiency in Albanian without extensive in-country experience.

Jan Kochanowski. *Occasional Poems*, trans. Michael J. Mikoś, with a foreword by Roman Krzywy, xxiv + 97 p. (ISBN 978-089357-519-9), \$22.95.

Occasional Poems, the third in this series of Jan Kochanowski's works, contains seven occasional poems rendered into English for the first time. They are: *On the Death of Jan Tarnowski*, *Memorial*, *Epithalamium*, *Incursion into Muscovy*, *Concord*, *Satyr*, and *Banner or the Prussian Homage*. They are presented here in thematic order; the first two are elegies, the next two celebrate the wedding of a powerful magnate and his victorious military campaign, while the last three deal with important political and religious issues in 16th-century Poland.



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Three String Books is an imprint of Slavica Publishers devoted to translations of literary works and belles-lettres from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and the other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Maria A. Shelyakhovskaya. *Being Grounded in Love: The History of One Russian Family, 1872–1981*, trans. Christina E. Petrides and Maria A. Shelyakhovskaya, xlvii + 450 p. (ISBN 978-089357-517-5), \$44.95.

Leo Tolstoy claimed that all happy families resemble one another; many in the West believe that all Russians are equally miserable. Maria (Gruzdeva) Shelyakhovskaya's *Being Grounded in Love: A History of One Russian Family, 1872–1981* challenges both such simplistic notions. *Being Grounded in Love* "is a conscious effort to look at and grasp the meaning of the tumultuous one hundred years of Russian and Soviet history (1872–1981)

by taking an ordinary family perspective as a vantage point and reconstructing it based on the materials of a well-preserved family archive. The result is a deeply entertaining and engaging collage of personal recollections, authentic voices, intimate



Three String Books

details, through which events of great magnitude—including multiple revolutions and wars—get illuminated in a distinctly personalized way. For sure, the ultimate result is partisan and partial, imbued with the partiality of love to one's own kin, the Gudzyuk-Gruzdev family. It is difficult to resist the feeling of compassion while reading entries of the personal diaries, the intimate correspondence of family members or listening to the collector's own voice recounting the family's itinerary through the century of troubles. Ultimately, by foregrounding love as a key motive, the book provides a story about the perseverance of human love and about the persistence of family ties as opposed to the heaviness of History."

—From the introduction by Vladimir Ryzhkovski



Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History

<https://kritika.georgetown.edu>

Kritika is dedicated to critical inquiry into the history of Russia and Eurasia. The quarterly journal features research articles as well as analytical review essays and extensive book reviews, especially of works in languages other than English. Subscriptions and previously published volumes available from Slavica—including, as of 16, no. 1, e-book editions (ePub, MOBI, PDF). Contact our business manager at slavica@indiana.com for all questions regarding subscriptions and eligibility for discounts.

Vol. 24, no. 3 (Summer 2023)

Articles

MIKHAIL DOLBILOV

Royal Illness, Professionalized Loyalty

MIKHAIL AKULOV

Weaponizing Self-Determination in 1918

NATALYA CHERNYSHOVA

Between Soviet and Ethnic

VLADIMIR HAMED-TROYANSKY

Welcome, Not Welcome:

Review Article

JAMES PICKETT

The Watchmaker

Review Essays

SHERZOD MUMINOV

Against Empires and Wars

JULIE HESSLER

Telling Russian History through Things

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Ab Imperio

Brill

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East European Politics and Societies

Eurasian Geography and Economics

Europe-Asia Studies

Kritika

Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research

Post-Soviet Affairs

Problems of Post-Communism

Revolutionary Russia

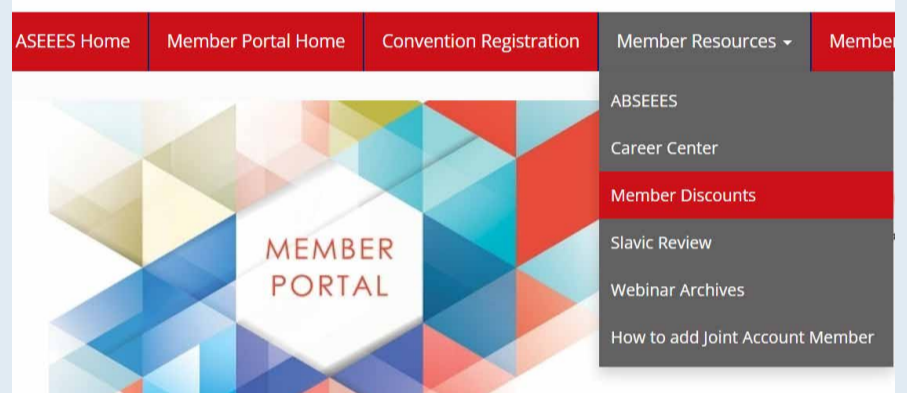
Russian Review

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

James Allen Nealy, Jr.

winner of 2023 Robert C. Tucker/Stephen F. Cohen Dissertation Prize

Postdoctoral Fellow at the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University (2023-24)



When did you first develop an interest in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies?

I was fascinated by maps when I was a child. The Soviet Union was so huge that maybe it was inevitable that an interest in maps would lead to an interest in that state. How could a place be so enormous? Why was this place so enormous? So, one of my teachers helped me to write a letter to the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations; I remember that we wrote something vague like: "Will you tell me about your country?" A few weeks later, I received a package full of magazines, books, and newspapers. I have been fascinated by all things Soviet ever since. I suppose I am evidence that great teachers can change lives and send people in any

number of wonderful and unpredictable directions.

What support have you received throughout your career that has allowed you to advance your scholarship?

I have been fortunate enough to receive funding from several institutions. My dissertation research was funded by a Fulbright-Hays DDRA fellowship and the American Councils Advanced Research Scholars Program. The ASEEES Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Completion Fellowship gave me a chance to focus on writing for an entire academic year. The Kennan Institute and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research have generously supported research and writing since I graduated in May 2022.

What is your current research project?

As a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University, during the academic year 2023-2024 I'll be working primarily on two major projects. First, I am turning my dissertation, "Making Socialism Work!: The Shchekino Method and the Drive to Modernize Soviet Industry," into a monograph. The manuscript examines Soviet efforts to improve social and economic conditions during the late twentieth century. It does so to understand Soviet socialism's capacity to evolve. "Making Socialism Work" is, at once, a social history of work, an economic history of a factory, and an intellectual history of social science and policy making. At its core, the work is comparative. Though labor history long ago took a "global turn," the Soviet Union has been left entirely out of these discussions. This is due in large part to an enduring vision that the Soviet economy "stagnated" in its early twentieth century form. In this literature, Soviet socialism represents the stubborn, unchanging "other" of an intrinsically dynamic Western capitalism. "Making Socialism Work" takes aim at these tropes to show how Soviet economic management and labor organization evolved in a way that resembled, but did not duplicate, changes in the capitalist world.



"Valentina Klishina at the Shchekino Chemical Combine (1970)," *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tul'skoi oblasti f. 5682, op. 2, d. 3 (no pagination).*

Second, I am co-editing, along with Emily Elliott, a volume on Soviet labor history that seeks to place the history of Soviet labor into conversation with that of the rest of the world. The collection of contributors we have put together is superb; I am fascinated by all of their topics, and I feel very lucky to have the opportunity to work with them to present their articles to the field. The volume is under contract with Lexington Books.

What do you value about your ASEEES membership? How has your involvement with ASEEES helped to further your career?

ASEEES has been instrumental to my career growth. I always learn so much from the annual convention - either from feedback I receive when presenting my own ideas or attending other panels. The conventions are also a great place to catch up with people I wish I could see more often and to meet really smart people who are doing good work. As I mentioned, the dissertation completion fellowship was an immense help. Winning the 2023 Tucker-Cohen Dissertation Prize is also very meaningful: it is very gratifying to have your ideas publicly supported by a committee of your peers; the prize will also make it possible for me to conduct research in the Baltics next summer.

While I have a chance, I also want to say that, in my opinion, ASEEES does a remarkable job with everything it handles: everyone is always so kind, professional, prepared, and helpful. It's a great organization to be a part of.



"Distillation Columns for Methanol Production at the Shchekino Chemical Combine (1957)" Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tul'skoi oblasti f. P – 3986, op. 7t.5, d. 1865, (no pagination).

Besides your professional work, what other interests and hobbies do you enjoy?

I enjoy hanging out with my wife and our dogs; watching baseball games and horror movies; and listening to heavy metal and Motown. Whenever I have a chance, I love to spend time in nature: I won't pretend that I actually know what I'm doing, but I really like birdwatching, for example. I also desperately want to meet a capybara.

The Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Fellowship Program

Deadline: January 29, 2024

The Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Research and Dissertation Completion Fellowships offer maximum stipends of \$25,000 for graduate students in any discipline whose dissertation topics involve 19th-early 21st century Russian historical studies. Please see the ASEEES website for full eligibility requirements.

The Stephen F. Cohen-Robert C. Tucker Dissertation Fellowship Program is sponsored by the KAT Charitable Foundation.

APPLY

Interview with Eugene M. Avrutin, incoming *Slavic Review* Editor

Eugene M. Avrutin, the Tobor Family Endowed Professor of Modern European Jewish History at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, took the helm as editor of *Slavic Review* in August 2023. You can read his bio [here](#).

You have researched and published widely on subjects such as religion, race, and borderlands in Eastern European and Russian history, focusing in particular on the history of Jews in modern Russia. Tell us about your background and path as a scholar of this region. What professional experiences, resources, or networks have been most important to your career?



I gravitated towards Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies while taking classes with Sidney Monas, Joan Neuberger, and Leslie O’Bell at the University of Texas at Austin. More than anything else, I like to tell stories about ordinary human experiences, an interest that I developed as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. That’s when Jewish Studies piqued my curiosity, as well. In terms of networks and experiences, the junior scholar workshops convened by the Social Science Research Council, the American Academy for Jewish Research, the International Forum of Young Scholars on East European Jewry, and the Summer Lab at the University of Illinois allowed me to present work in progress and to meet other researchers from around the world at similar career stages. Those sessions were so valuable that I now coordinate or take part in similar workshops or seminars for younger scholars. Most recently, due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, I have begun to value public-facing scholarship, particularly the opportunity to experiment with different forms of writing and public engagement, to produce new resources for a wide audience, and to share scholarship beyond the academy.

How do you envision the direction that *Slavic Review* will take over the next five years? What can readers expect from *Slavic Review* under your editorship?

It’s truly humbling to be named editor of *Slavic Review*. My colleagues – Harriet Murav, Mark Steinberg, and Diane Koenker – have published, over several decades, some of the best interdisciplinary scholarship about Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and Russia. The first order of business is to learn the complexities and mysteries of ScholarOne, the web-based system that manages the submissions and tracks manuscripts and peer review. This past summer, Harriet has provided expert tutoring, and I hope I’ll be up to speed so that the editorial transition is as smooth as it can be. Several changes are on the horizon, although I have no plans to rethink the journal from the ground up. *Slavic Review* will be published in an online-only format in 2024,* a major move for the journal and ASEEES, reflecting the changing dynamics of academic journal publishing. Harriet, Dmitry Tartakovsky, and I have worked with the team at Cambridge to redesign the journal, including a bold new cover design. On the inside, the journal will feature a new typeface, layout, and several other elements. Future plans include a website refresh. The new look of the journal will debut with the publication of the first issue in 2024. I hope members of the Association are as thrilled as I am by the new look.

How do you understand the role of editor? What are your priorities as editor of *Slavic Review*? What excites you most about this role?

My role as editor is to publish innovative research that meets the highest standards and to engage in lively conversations around topics of central importance to the SEEES field. *Slavic Review* will continue to prioritize publishing traditional peer-reviewed scholarly articles and thematic clusters of articles on a common topic, in addition to review essays, book and film reviews, and the occasional book forum. I am a big fan of short form writing, and I think it’s wonderful that the journal has moved in this direction in recent years. As editor, I would like to continue publishing innovative scholarly forums and short think-pieces on pertinent controversies and issues. The recent [forum on Race and Bias](#) is a great example of the

kind of contributions that speak to a broad interdisciplinary audience and push our field in rewarding directions.

What role does this journal play in the SEEEES field? What are its core principles? How might its role shift in coming years?

Slavic Review is committed to providing extensive coverage of a very diverse region. No other journal publishes cutting-edge interdisciplinary research, by authors from all over the world, as well as 50-60 book reviews, 2-4 film reviews, and 2-4 featured reviews in each issue concerning eastern and east central Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The war in Ukraine has created numerous challenges for the field. The journal will respond, as it has always done, to the region's combustible geopolitics by grappling with timely questions: the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, the rise of anti-democratic practices, the challenges of international security, and the resurgence of far-right exclusionary and dehumanizing ideologies, among many other pressing issues. No less significant is the closure of libraries and archives to researchers in the field. I am fortunate to have stumbled upon really interesting materials while researching in archives and libraries in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. It's really a tragedy for our profession -- and particularly the younger scholars -- that access to the materials has been cut off. As have many other academic organizations and scholarly journals in the SEEEES field, *Slavic Review* will continue to find ways to overcome the monumental challenge to knowledge production.

How has academic publishing changed in recent years? What challenges or developments do you expect to encounter as editor? In what ways has the digital age asked new questions of *Slavic Review* – and how might it respond?

Technology has obviously disrupted the traditional publishing model. Academic journals are responding to the new economic and digital environment – for better or worse, depending on your point of view – some going completely online, as with *Slavic Review*. All one hears these days is “sustainable publishing,” “open access,” “workflow integration,” “transformative agreements,” and other buzzwords. The challenge for *Slavic Review* is not to fall behind: to respond to the digital revolution in a way that increases our competitiveness and at the same time meets the needs of our diverse membership. We need to retain features of the journal such as single book and film reviews, which are valued by our readers but do not necessarily carry the same weight in the publishing

industry. I certainly hope that the journal will be able to take advantage of the new opportunities in digital publishing. The traditional scholarly article could become interactive, for example. Authors could integrate video clips, images, and maps in their publications. It would be wonderful if we could expand the type of scholarship that appears in the journal, including digital humanities projects. Perhaps we could even collaborate on a podcast.

**A limited number of print copies will be available for an additional charge.*

ASEEES thanks the outgoing editor, Harriet Murav, for ten years of dedicated service to *Slavic Review*, and to the University of Illinois for its continued support.

Forthcoming in *Slavic Review*
Volume 82, Summer 2023

“Deconstructing ‘Nowoczesna Gospodyni’: The Home Efficiency Movement, Gender Roles, and Material Culture in Late State Socialist Poland”

Patryk Wasiake and Katarzyna Stańczyak Wiślicz

“Letters from the Ottoman Empire: Migration from the Caucasus and Russia’s Pan-Islamic Panic”

Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky

“Dangerous Illusions and Fatal Subversions: Russia, Subjugated Rus’, and the Origins of the First World War”

Olga Andriemsky

“Crooked and Straight: Street Stories and Moral Stories in Early Soviet Odessa”

Mark D. Steinberg

“Provincial Revolution and Regional Anti-Colonialism: The Soviets in Iran, 1920-1921”

Kayhan A. Nejad

“Rethinking Soviet Selfhood in the Era of the Anthropocene: From the Foucauldian Paradigm to the Naturecultural Theory of the Subject”

Epp Annus

“As the Forest is Chopped, the Chips Fly: The Fall of Soviet Internationalism and Late Perestroika’s ‘Refugee’ Problem, 1988-1990”

Lyudmila B. Austin

“War and Peace: Orthodox Icons and Putin’s Politics of the Sacred”

Amy Singleton Adams



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New ACLS Publication: “Before the First Day of Graduate School”

In conversation with 78 other scholarly societies, ASEEES recently contributed to the creation of the American Council of Learned Societies’ (ACLS) new guide to supporting graduate students at the earliest stages of their careers.

“[Before the First Day of Graduate School](#)” (2023) offers:

“...best practices for navigating doctoral education in the humanities and interpretive social sciences as a whole person. It provides a map of the institutional contexts in the university within which individual PhD programs operate, with a focus on North American institutions.”



Before the First Day of Graduate School

Introduction: Why This Guide?

This document suggests best practices for navigating doctoral education in the humanities and interpretive social sciences as a whole person. It provides a map of the institutional contexts in the university within which individual PhD programs operate, with a focus on North American institutions. Its purpose is to empower all readers (including undergraduates considering graduate school, doctoral students, and faculty) with knowledge about how to make the doctoral experience enriching and humane—despite the structural inequities that characterize higher

education and the professional pressures, financial worries, and emotional ups and downs that typically arise through the process. It was written by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in conversation with colleagues and scholars across the disciplines. We at ACLS are grateful for their thoughtful insights and suggestions, and we encourage readers to consult their own scholarly societies’ websites for more information and support. Many societies offer specialized advice on doctoral education.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Why This Guide?
The 21st Century University
How Universities Work
How to Work in the University
Maintaining Momentum and Well-Being
Career Planning and Future Thinking
Appendix: Resources About ACLS

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

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Why This Guide?

“Its purpose is to empower all readers (including undergraduates considering graduate school, doctoral students, and faculty) with knowledge about how to make the doctoral experience enriching and humane—despite the structural inequities that characterize higher education and the professional pressures, financial worries, and emotional ups and downs that typically arise through the process.”

Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America (PIASA)

Call for Nominations Deadline: November 1, 2023

Each award will receive a \$1000 prize and will also be recognized during the PIASA’s 9th World Congress at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, June 7-9, 2024.

The Rachel Feldhay Brenner Award in Polish-Jewish Studies

This award is given annually to the author of the best English-language book on the history and/or culture of Polish Jews.

The Oskar Halecki Polish and East-Central European History Award

This award recognizes a scholar in the field of Polish and East-Central European history who has written a book of particular value and significance dealing with the Polish experience or including the Polish experience within a larger East-Central European context. The book or body of work should represent exemplary historical research and writing.

The Wacław Lednicki Award in the Humanities

This award recognizes the most outstanding book or creative work published, produced or presented in any of the fields encompassed within the Humanities as defined by the National Endowment for

the Humanities, to include fine arts, history, languages, literature, philosophy, religion, etc. However, since Polish history has its own PIASA award, works in this field are ineligible.

The Ann M. Cienciala Award for Best Edited Multi-Author Scholarly Volume

Eligible books must be edited multi-author collections of scholarly articles or essays in the various fields of Polish studies broadly understood. Editors and contributors need not be members of PIASA.

The Karol Pilarczyk Foundation Award to Promote Democracy and the Rule of Law

This award furthers democracy and the rule of law by funding Polish and non-Polish citizens working in the areas of Polish studies and culture who seek to facilitate these broad goals. It is intended to support individual academics, journalists, writers, researchers, scientists, and artists by recognizing and publicizing the recipient’s accomplishments and/or promoting their future endeavors as relevant to the award’s general purpose through scholarship and creative work.

The Bronisław Malinowski Award in the Social Sciences

This award recognizes a scholar in one of the fields of the social sciences who has written a book or seminal publication of particular value and significance dealing with an aspect of the Polish experience.

New ASEEES Study: “The State of Russian Studies in the United States: 2022”



ASEEES has published [“The State of Russian Studies in the United States: 2022,”](#) authored by Theodore Gerber (U of Wisconsin-Madison) and Michael Zaslavsky (U of Wisconsin-Madison). The report presents the findings of a study the authors conducted in 2022 on behalf of ASEEES, with funding from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The purpose of the study was to assess the state of the interdisciplinary field of Russian studies in the United States as of 2022, with reference to a [previous study of the same topic](#) published by ASEEES in 2015. The latest study was planned before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022; it was subsequently re-oriented toward analyzing how the war has affected Russian studies, with particular attention to how those who conduct research on Russia with the social sciences and humanities perceive recent discussions about the need to de-colonize Slavic studies and de-center Russia within them.

The investigators conducted interviews, focus groups, a survey of centers at universities in the United States supporting research and teaching about Russia, and a survey of individual scholars who have conducted research on Russia in the last five years. In addition to examining the **impact of full-scale invasion and views of de-colonization**, the study also focused on longer term trends since 2015 (using data from the 2015 for the purpose of comparison) and **the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, the worsening of US-Russia relations, and the crackdown on civil liberties and academic freedoms within Russia.**

These latter challenges to Russian studies pre-dated the war and confronted a field already grappling with **declining enrollments in Russian language courses, waning interest from PhD students in the disciplines, diminishing faculty coverage**, and a **tendency for scholars to move away from conducting research on Russia** as their careers proceeded. Their adverse impact is evident in a range of indicators pointing to declining interest in Russia among US-based graduate students and researchers since 2015. But other measures pointed to resilience of research and graduate education on Russia despite the challenges. If Russian studies had to navigate troubled waters through 2021, the war hit the field like a tsunami, leaving many scholars of Russia reeling and upending the way they had become accustomed to practicing their trade. However, sizable majorities within the field support the various goals of de-colonization, though support diminishes when those goals are framed as coming at the expense of Russian studies. The report concludes by proposing five policy priorities for donors, scholars, and other stakeholders interested in preserving what various corners of the field have achieved in recent years, while also moving forward to proactively adopt to the emergent challenges.

At the upcoming ASEEES Annual Convention, Theodore Gerber will present the main findings in more detail, four researchers from different fields will offer commentary, and audience members will have the chance to share their thoughts on the study and the state of the field. For more on the roundtable, click [here](#).

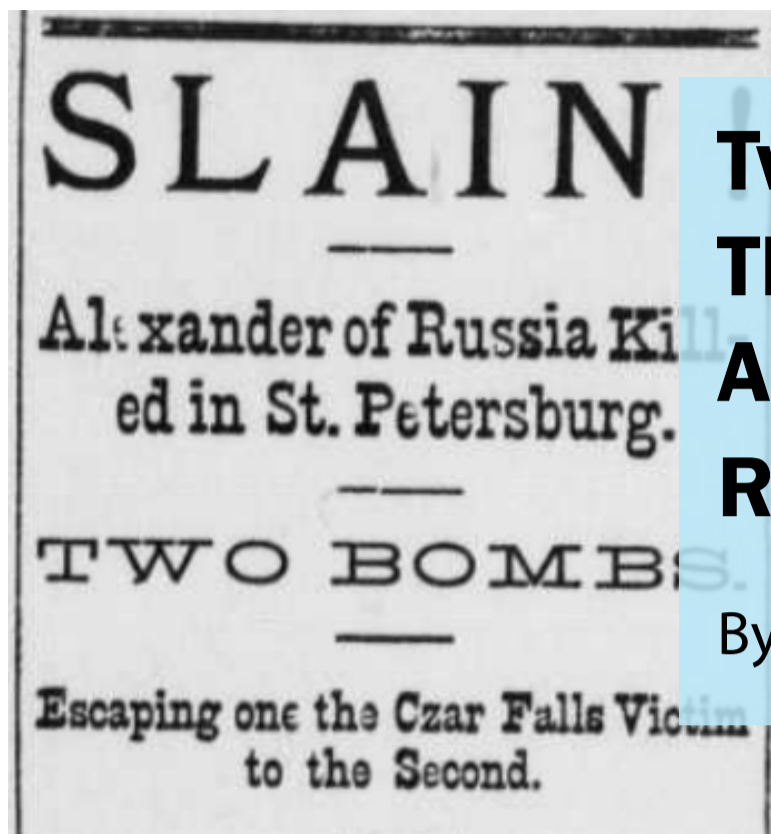


Image: "Slain," *The Daily Gazette*, March 14, 1881, 1, University of Delaware Library.

Two Men Who Gave Freedom: The Assassination of Alexander II in the Context of Russian-American Relations

By E. Thomas Ewing and De'Vonte Tinsley

Almost as soon as news of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II reached the United States via telegraph wires, newspapers responded with commentaries on the ruler, on the Russian political system, and on assassination as an instrument of radical politics. On March 14, 1881, the [Evening Star](#) (Washington, D.C.) noted that Abraham Lincoln and Tsar Alexander II, "the two men who gave freedom to the greatest number of human beings of which history makes any record," had each died at the hands of assassins. Yet this coincidence prompted diverging interpretations depending on the perspective of the newspapers. On March 19, for example, the [Indianapolis Leader](#), a Black newspaper, emphasized the "vast difference" between Lincoln and Alexander II: "Lincoln was assassinated because he was a friend of liberty and the union of the States. Alexander lost his life because he was the representative of despotism and the autocracy of one man power." By contrast, the [Keowee Courier](#), published in the former Confederate state of South Carolina, criticized both Lincoln and Alexander because their acts of emancipation had spread discontent and fostered social upheaval: "In the name of liberty much wrong was done."

In a [collaborative project](#) in spring 2022, undergraduate students in Tom Ewing's course on Imperial Russian history at Virginia Tech examined newspaper reporting about the death of the Russian Tsar. The exercise was designed to advance primary source research skills while also providing

new insights into American perceptions of Russia. One of the first editorials uncovered during this assignment was in the aforementioned *Keowee Courier*, which students found shocking as it so clearly expressed the efforts of the post-war southern white establishment to undermine the remarkable achievement of the end of slavery. Based on this one example, we – a professor and a student – devised a research protocol to explore more editorials from a wider range of states to ask how the historical memory of the American Civil War shaped interpretations of the assassination of Alexander II. To our surprise, our initial assumption of sharp differences between southern and northern newspapers was not supported by more extensive research. A more systematic search for newspapers comparing Lincoln and Alexander II found a wider range of perspectives that complicated our understanding of this moment in American history.

As co-authors, we brought different perspectives to this study of American perceptions of Russia based on our own scholarly trajectories: a faculty member who first studied Russian history during the Cold War, and has observed the changing status of Russia in the world across thirty years of continuous teaching, and a recent college graduate, a double major in Russian and history, who is beginning graduate study of Russian history at a time when relations with Russia have seemingly reverted to the tensions of the Cold War.

Scholarly Interest in Revolutionary Russia and US-Russian Relations

This project represented a convergence of our shared interests in the history of revolutionary thought and movements in Russia. Ewing's interest in this topic began with a first research paper, in a course, taught by Professor William Wagner in fall 1985, on the revolutionary thought of Pavel Pestel, leader of the short-lived Decembrist movement in 1825. This interest continued into a senior honors thesis on the tension between Lenin's transformative vision and the struggle for self-government in revolutionary Russia. As an instructor, these themes have been part of his teaching of Russian history for more than thirty years. This research project on populist terrorists continued this interest by examining both the act of assassination and the response of American newspapers.

Tinsley's interest in revolutionary Russia originated in his study of the Russian Civil War, as he became fascinated by Bolshevik ideology and how the myriad of problems facing the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, such as famine, administrative collapse, and military intervention, forced them to adapt, shift, and sometimes abandon previously held ideological positions. Tinsley is particularly interested in how the Bolsheviks' belief in internationalism and the equality of nations continuously transformed and molded to fit Russia's ethnically diverse landscape throughout the existence of the Soviet Union. Inspired by Donald Raleigh's local study of Saratov during the Russian Civil War, Tinsley wrote a senior thesis on Dvinsk (Daugavpils) during the Russian Civil War which explored Bolshevik military strategy, ideological debates, responses to famine and disease, and nationalist conflicts. For Tinsley, an examination of assassination as a tool adopted by radical nihilist terrorist organizations built upon and expanded his knowledge of the revolutionary thought in Russia that eventually led to the calamity of 1917.

The class project was assigned in early January 2022, at a time when Russian aggression against Ukraine was capturing global attention and mobilizing an international diplomatic response. Yet many believed that an invasion was unlikely—and even fewer could have predicted the effective Ukrainian resistance, the international response, and the extraordinary human costs. From this perspective, studying a moment in history when the United States revealed sharply contrasting perceptions of Russia at a

moment of crisis provides revealing insights into both continuities and changes in this global dynamic.

This assignment and collaborative research project also took shape in a context of increasing awareness of the historical impact of institutionalized racism in the United States and globally. While neither of the co-authors has expertise in the history of the United States, our research on American responses to a critical moment in Russian history also responded to efforts within [the field of Slavic studies](#) to address questions of racial identity and racist institutions.

In summer 2020, in response to the movements for racial justice, Ewing [adjusted his course](#) in the history of Russia to Peter the Great to examine a moment when public protest directly challenged the regime's ideological principles and structures of governing. By contrast, the assignment on US newspaper reporting on the assassination of Alexander II was not originally designed to address how US race relations shaped perceptions of Russia. In hindsight, this perspective was an obvious omission, as suggested by the examples cited above, as American newspapers revealed the durable, if contested, impact of the Civil War, slavery, and the memory of President Lincoln.

For Tinsley, this research project provided a unique opportunity to explore racial attitudes in the United States and examine what role race played in the American understanding of Russia. This topic is important for Tinsley because racial attitudes in America and America's treatment of minorities (African-Americans in particular), would become a focal point during the Cold War and one of the Soviet Union's main criticisms of the United States and the Western world more generally.

Interpreting Newspaper Editorials

Our research was made easier by the fact that editorials comparing these two assassinations appeared relatively soon after March 1 (March 13 in the western calendar), which meant our searching could be limited to a couple of weeks after the act. The keyword "assassination" produced many results; proximity searches for "Czar" or "Emperor" and "Lincoln" identified editorials making the comparison central to our research question. The research was complicated, however, by the need to consult multiple databases of digitized newspapers. To complete the

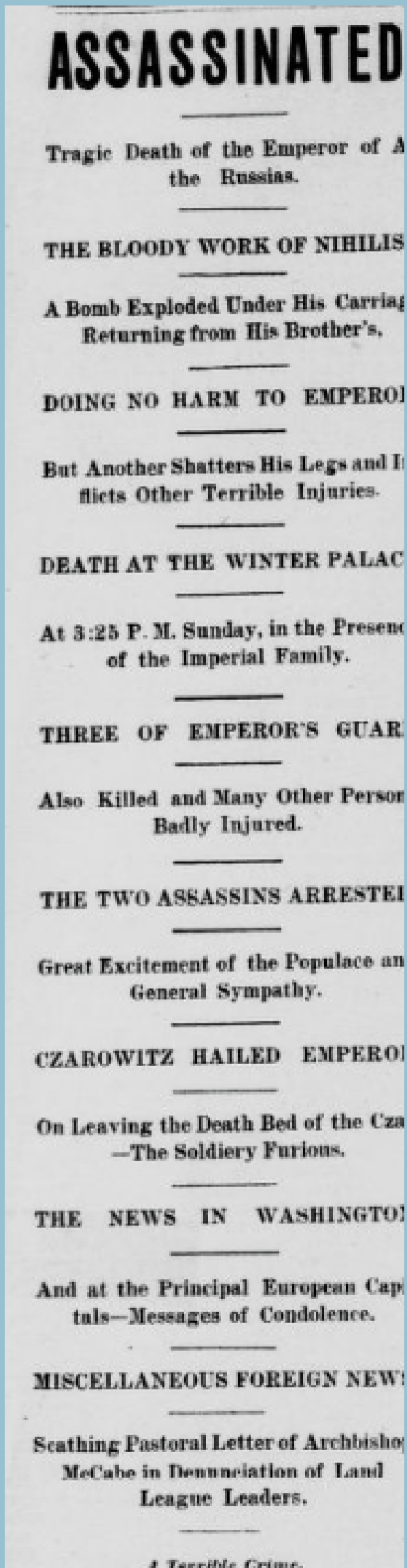


Image: "Assassinated," *Daily Globe*, March 14, 1881, 1, Minnesota Historical Society.

research for this essay, we consulted at least ten databases, including public resources, such as *Chronicling America* for the entire United States, and state collections for [Virginia](#), [Texas](#), [Florida](#), [North Carolina](#), [Georgia](#), and other states. We also consulted subscription databases, including [Proquest Historical Newspapers](#), [Readex America's Historical Newspapers](#), and [Newspapers.com](#).

Our research located editorials from more than twenty newspapers published in states of the former Confederacy. This selection made it possible to gauge the range of perspectives which newspapers in this region brought to understand the assassination of the Russian emperor. We also examined editorials from the rest of the United States, many of which drew comparisons between Lincoln and Alexander II or between the emancipation of slaves in the United States and the emancipation of serfs in Russia. Fourteen newspapers made some comparison between these two acts, including four newspapers from the former Confederacy.

These results were surprising, given what we had seen in the *Keowee Courier*. The southern newspapers expressed a range of different perspectives when they drew connections between these two assassinations. The [Daily Dispatch](#) (Richmond, Virginia) described Lincoln as "one of America's most honest, most conscientious, and best rulers—one, too, who, like the Czar, had emancipated all the slaves in his country." The *St. Joseph Gazette* (Missouri) republished, without comment, the *Evening Star* declaration of the "coincidence" that two rulers who gave freedom to the greatest number of human beings in history both died at the hand of an assassin. The [Weekly Intelligencer](#) (Lexington, Missouri) declared that the Russian Tsar Alexander II had "liberated twenty million serfs, and then they and their fellow workmen turned upon him and hounded him to death," which was followed by this question: "Had Lincoln lived till now would the slaves that he set free have remained grateful to him?" The editorial declared that Lincoln certainly would have opposed any form of radicalism, but it was "extremely doubtful" that he could have retained the "friendship" of the emancipated slaves. These three editorials, all from states of the former Confederacy, expressed a range of perspectives, including the positive position of the Virginia paper and the more speculative view of the Missouri newspaper.

As noted above, the *Keowee Courier*, published in South

Carolina, took a very different position. Proclaiming that the emancipation of slaves by Lincoln and serfs by Alexander II had “caused a complete upheaval of society,” the editorial declared that the “joy of the liberated was hushed by the cries of suffering and want,” as “liberty” became “another name for license,” “aspirations” were not fulfilled, “discontent” spread “even among the freed people of both countries,” and “the wounds made by these radical measures have not yet been entirely healed in either country.” The editorial concluded that “it is a sad thing to contemplate, but it is none-the-less true,” that these “two distinguished persons” actually “fell by the hands of those perhaps who had been crazed by these events.” The racist implications of this position was quite clear: the emancipation of slaves was damaging to American society, as African Americans, from this perspective, were better off in slavery than in freedom.

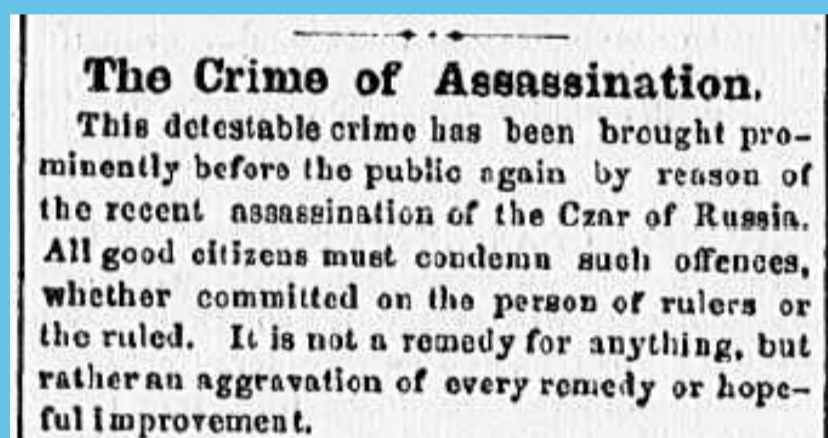


Image: “The Crime of Assassination,” *Keowee Courier*, March 23, 1881, 2, University of South Carolina.

Northern newspapers were consistently more positive about the legacy of President Lincoln, yet also expressed a range of opinions about the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. The [Independent Record](#)* (Helena, Montana) published an extended reflection on two assassinations committed by “a young madman” in the United States and university students “more or less infected with Nihilist doctrines” in Russia, and concluding: “All history proves that assassination is the poorest of all remedies for evils, either real or imaginary.” The [McPherson Leader](#)* (Kansas) declared that the assassination of Lincoln “was the act of a vain crack-brained dramatist, who slew, without cause, purpose, or provocation, a liberty-loving patriot hailing from the ranks of the people,” whereas the assassination of the Tsar was “the act of a patriot, inspired by an intense love of liberty, to rid a nation of a tyrant.” The [Ottawa Daily Republic](#)* (Kansas) drew this simple comparison: “Lincoln, the liberator of the blacks, and Alexander II, the

liberator of the serfs, both died by an assassin’s hand.” In the first two examples, the comparison with Lincoln became a platform for criticizing the Russian political system while also denigrating the motives of the assassins. The comment from the Kansas newspaper, by contrast, suggested that Lincoln and Alexander II were similar in both their achievements and in their deaths.

The results of our research are a cautionary tale about asking good research questions, avoiding making incorrect assumptions, and a reminder about using primary sources to guide historical analysis. Our research began with a question about the variation in American newspaper responses resulting from the divergent regional perceptions of the American Civil War, the emancipation of the slaves, and the assassination of Lincoln. We thought that the editorial in the *Keowee Courier* was representative of broader trends in southern newspapers, but further searching and close reading suggests that this assumption was incorrect, as the negative comparisons with Lincoln did not appear in other newspapers. Searching for representative examples and reading them closely suggested that southern newspapers brought a wider range of perspectives to this issue, including at least one, the *Richmond Dispatch*, which wrote as positively about Lincoln as some northern newspapers. Of course, our research was limited both by the search terms used and by the availability of digitized newspapers, so further exploration may uncover more newspapers that expressed perspectives more similar to those of the *Keowee Courier*.

American Exceptionalism

A consistent theme across all US newspaper responses to the assassination of Tsar Alexander II was the belief that this act represented the oppressive nature of the autocratic system and the fanatic character of the regime’s opponents. The *Richmond Dispatch* editorial cited above included this affirmation of the “immeasurable difference” between the American and Russian political systems: “whereas nobody expects assassination to cut short the career of any future President of the United States, nobody would be surprised if the new Czar should encounter a fate similar to that of his father.” Yet less than four months later, on July 2, 1881, President Garfield was shot by an assassin. After ten weeks of unsuccessful medical treatment, Garfield died of his wounds on September 19, 1881, the second US president in two decades to be assassinated in office.

A search of American newspaper reporting immediately after the shooting of President Garfield reveals continued efforts to highlight the exceptionalism of the United States. The *Inter Ocean** (Chicago, Illinois) declared: "This is the United States, not Russia or Ireland." The *Atchison Daily Companion** declared that this deed "reduces us, the free, intelligent, enlightened Republic of the world, to the level of a South American Confederation or Russian autocracy." The *Daily Republican** (Wilmington, Delaware) declared that the United States "can never adopt a policy of assassination like Russia and Turkey." Whereas the attempted assassination of the American president was completely unexpected and irrational, the situation in Russia was different, according to the *Northern Tribune** (Cheboygan, Michigan): "The assassination of the Czar of Russia it is true, startled the world, but Nihilism had been rampant and threatening, so that that atrocity was not wholly unlooked for, and for that deed there was at least imaginary wrongs, if not real, of an oppressed people as a motive."

a durable perception of American exceptionalism has been part of our experience of studying Russian history

This durable perception of American exceptionalism has been part of our experience of studying Russian history related to each of the themes identified above. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced the United States to coordinate a forceful international response with allies that has tempered some of the unilateralism characteristic of earlier eras. The attention to racial injustice in the last decade has demonstrated continuities in structural inequalities and discriminatory systems in the United States and globally. The rise of authoritarian, extremist, and violent political movements in the United States, in the wake of the 2020 election and in anticipation of the 2024 election, certainly calls into question any claim, like those made so easily in 1881, that acts of political violence could never happen here.

This project has reinforced our shared interest in the revolutionary possibilities that emerged at key moments in Russian history. The assassination of Alexander II is usually presented as a key turning point in the history of Russian

radicalism, from the failed uprising in December 1825 to the establishment of Soviet power in October 1917. This review of American responses to this assassination situates this act in a broader comparative framework that recognizes anxieties about political radicalism, criticism of despotic monarchies, and fears of political assassination as key elements of Russian-American relations. Focusing on the motivations of radicals, the debate about means and ends, and the implications of public actions provide important perspectives on the possibilities for further changes in the Russian political system in the future. This project was also shaped by our awareness of related issues in the broader global context. Almost every class

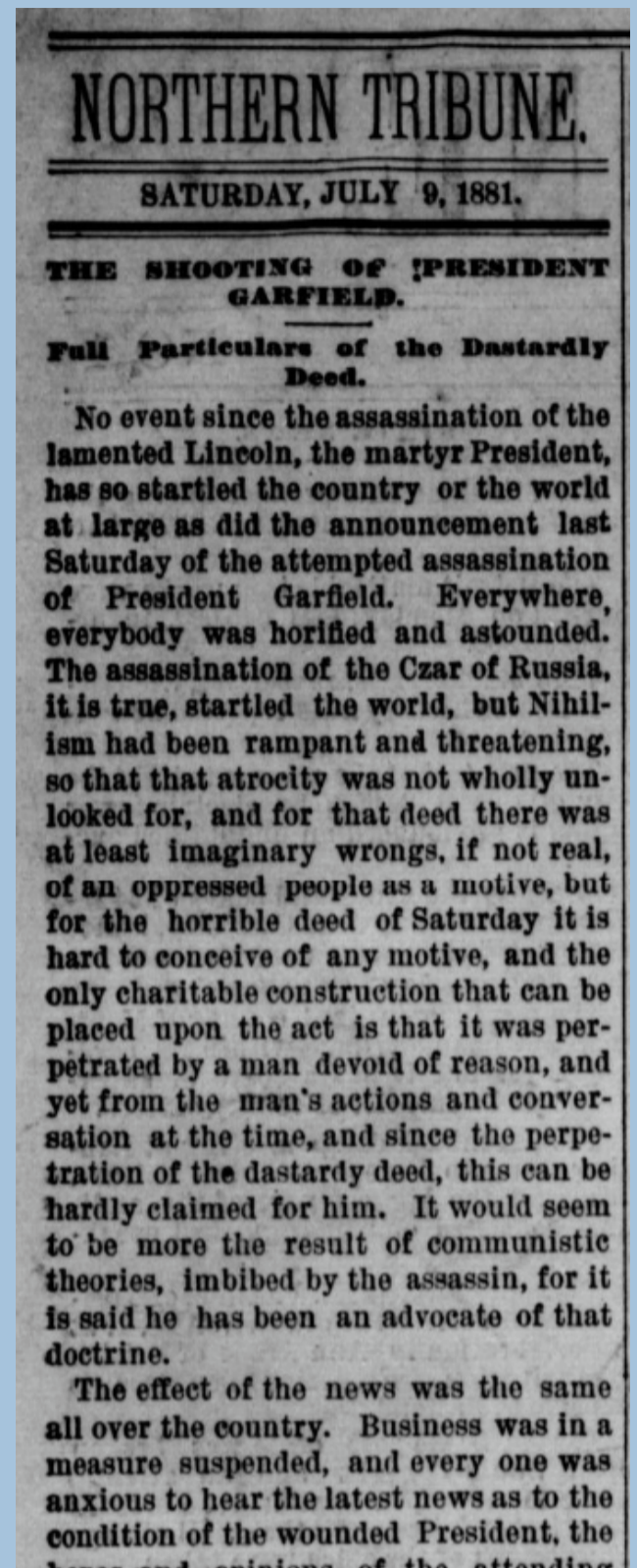


Image: "The Shooting of President Garfield,"
Northern Tribune, July 9, 1882, 2, Central
Michigan University, Clark Historical Library.

session of the Imperial Russian course in spring 2022 began with a discussion of the current situation in Russia, among Russia’s borders, and in relation to the United States. This effort to situate historical content in relation to contemporary issues takes time, but is worth the effort if it helps students understand why history matters for making sense of the present and anticipating the future. At a time of international polarization, increasing authoritarianism, and isolationist movements, a better understanding of how to bring meaningful and lasting political change must remain at the center of teaching and research in the field of Slavic studies and more broadly across the academy.

**Requires subscription to newspapers.com.*

Funding for this research was provided by the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech.



E. Thomas Ewing is a professor of history at Virginia Tech, where he teaches courses on Russian history, data in social context, and history of medicine. His research exploring the history of epidemics, including the “Russian Influenza” of 1889-1892, has been published in *Public Health Reports*, *Medical History*, and the *Washington Post*.



De’Vonte Tinsley is a 2023 graduate of Virginia Tech, with majors in History and Russian and a minor in Russian Area Studies. He is attending the University of Pennsylvania as part of the PhD program in History, where he will be continuing his research on the Russian Civil War while also studying Soviet-Vietnamese relations.

Regional Affiliate Conferences

Central Slavic Conference

November 3-5, 2023

Saint Louis University (virtual option available)

Submission Deadline: October 1 (CfP)

Proposals for papers, panels, and roundtables should be submitted by email to CSC Vice President Sergey Toymentsev at centralslavicconference@gmail.com no later than **Sunday, October 1**. All proposals should include:

- Participant name, affiliation, and email contact information
- For individual paper presentations: title and description (250 words maximum)
- For panels and roundtables: title + above information for each participant/discussant
- For undergraduate presentations, the name of the faculty member supporting the participant
- An indication of whether the participant/group will present virtually or in person

CSC will dedicate a portion of the conference to undergraduate research presentations. Faculty are encouraged to support conference proposals from undergraduate students for this

section of the conference. Limited funding is available to provide graduate and undergraduate students with travel stipends.

Students who present at the CSC Annual Meeting are invited to participate in the Charles Timberlake Memorial Paper Prize competition in graduate and undergraduate categories. Dedicated to the memory of Charles Timberlake as a teacher and mentor, the prize carries a cash award.

2024 Regional Affiliate Conferences

Midwest Slavic Association

April 5-7, 2024 - Ohio State University

Western Association of Slavic Studies

April 3-6, 2024 - San Antonio, TX
Proposal Deadline: Jan 15, 2024 (CfP)

Southern Conference on Slavic Studies

March 14-17, 2024 - Chapel Hill, NC
Celebrating 60 years

Northwest Regional Conference for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies

April 11-13, 2024 - University of Washington

Member News



William Brumfield,
Self-portrait with
Nikon: night over
Charles River,
Cambridge.
Summer 1979

William Brumfield's photography collection, "[Lost America](#)," was featured in an exhibition at the [Museum of Architecture in Moscow](#).

Brian James Baer and **Yevgeniy Fiks** published an edited volume, "[Queer\(ing\) Russian Art: Realism, Revolution, Performance](#)" (Academic Studies Press, 2023).

Olga M. Cooke published an edited volume, "[A Mind Purified by Suffering: Evgenia Ginzburg's 'Whirlwind' Memoirs](#)" (Academic Studies Press, 2023).

Éva Forgács published [Malevich and Interwar Modernism: Russian Art and the International of the Square](#) (Bloomsbury, 2022). She has also received a grant from the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften / Kunstuniversität Linz (IFK) in Vienna, October 2023-Jan. 2024, to work on the edited volume [Between Point Zero and the Iron Curtain: International Cooperation in Art and the Postwar Moment, 1945-1948](#).

Maksim Hanukai published [Tragic Encounters: Pushkin and European Romanticism](#) (University of Wisconsin Press, 2023).

Debra Javeline published [After Violence: Russia's Beslan School Massacre and the Peace that Followed](#) (Oxford University Press, 2023).

Michael R. Katz published a new translation of [The Brothers Karamazov](#) by Fyodor Dostoevsky (Liveright, 2023).

Bruce Parrott published [Becoming a Social Science Researcher: Quest and Context](#) (University of Michigan Press, 2023).

Serhii Plokhly published [The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History](#) (Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc., 2023).

Erik R. Scott published [Defectors: How the Illicit Flight of Soviet Citizens Built the Borders of the Cold War World](#) (Oxford University Press, 2023).

Klavdia Smola published [Reinventing Tradition: Russian-Jewish Literature between Soviet Underground and Post-Soviet Deconstruction](#) (Academic Studies Press, 2023).

Miglena Todorova received the 2023 Achievement Award for Outstanding Research and Teaching Contributions to Women and Education from the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education / Association Canadienne Pour L'étude sur les Femmes et L'éducation (CASWE/ACÉFÉ).

